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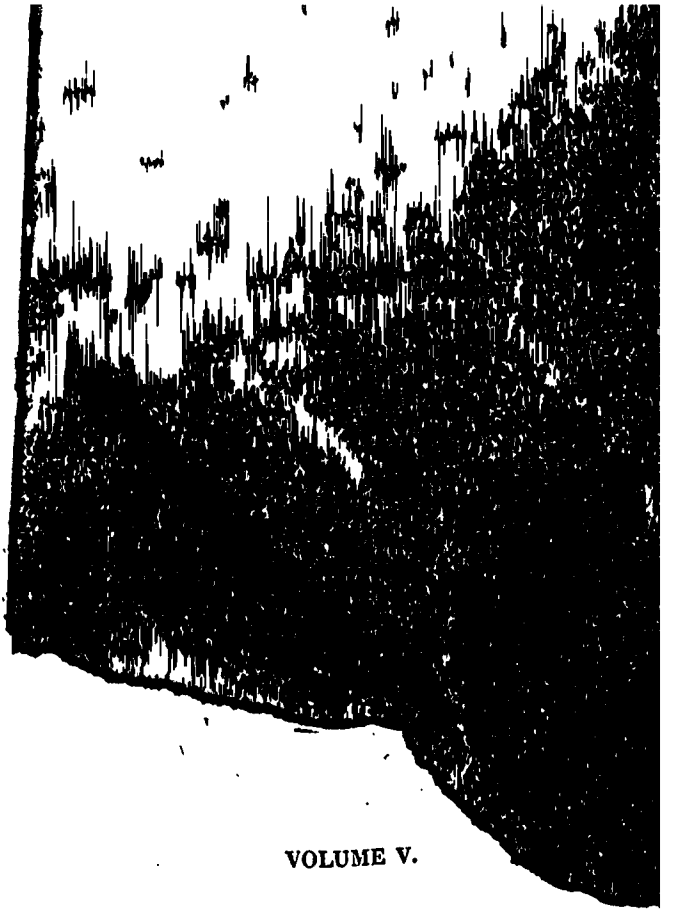

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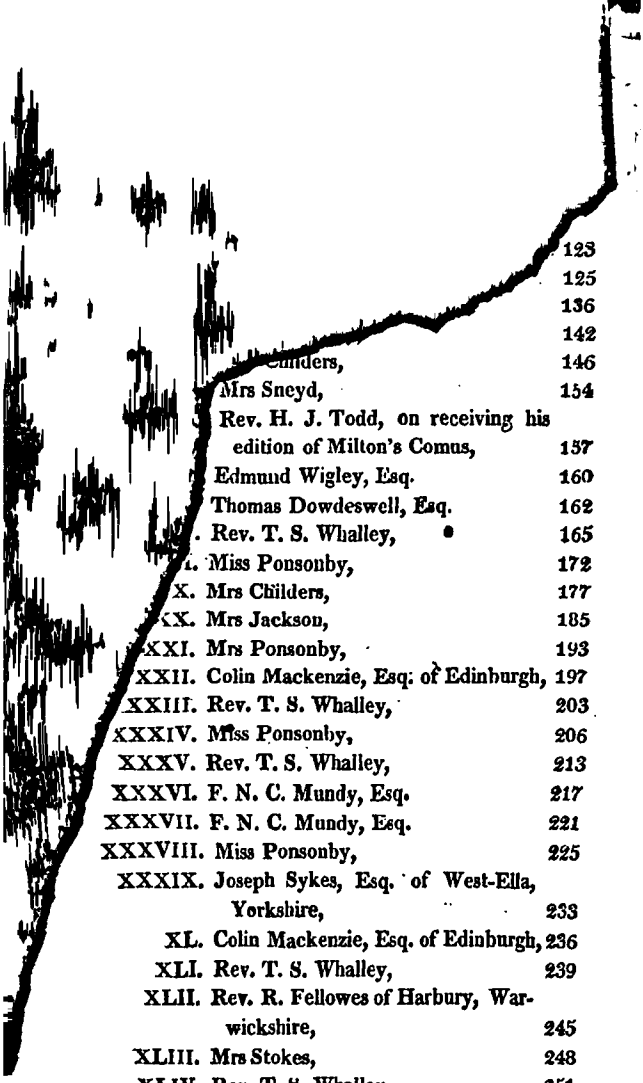

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LETTERS

OF

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LETTERS.

LETTER I.

MRS CHILDERS of Yorkshire.

Oct. 17, 1797.

I HAVE been but a short time at home: your letter, with nine others, met me on my arrival, after waiting for me some weeks with unbroken seals. Immediately on my return, drawn into a vortex of visiting engagements, and my mornings sacrificed to calls of welcome, I have as yet not been able to resume the dropt reins of my employments, domestic and epistolary;—yet to solicitude, kind as yours, I cannot be silent. My health is better for my excursion, which no return of the frightful hemorrhage annoyed, and my visits in Wales, on my circuit home, gave me those charms of confidential affection and intellectual participation, which the cold, ceremonial, and vapid society of High-Lake could not afford. I

would not have been born with a soul so tempered as that of some of the stately ladies I met there, for Gunning beauty, Pulteney wealth, and Norfolk precedency.

My first visit was to Mrs Price, at the large, ancient, and venerable seat of her ancestors—situated, like other grand mansions of olden time, in the flattest, and consequently the least picturesque spot in a country so wildly, so witchingly lavish of hill and dale. Proud once and princely was the mansion, ere a succession of spendthrifts waned away its splendour.

From Emral, I sought again the trebly consecrated Vale of Langollen, and found its magnificent scenery possessing heightened charms, from beholding it with the affection of local friendship, which is with me a much more powerful auxiliary to admiration than novelty. It is just the difference with which the admirer and the lover beholds the form of beauty. The ladies of the Vale, the, in all but the voluptuous sense, Armidas of its bowers, received me with every energy of regard and affection. So rich was the scenic and intellectual banquet of their mansion, as to make me half-inclined to regret as intrusive, the several visitors who paid homage at that Arcadian court while I was resident there; though all were distinguished either by elevation of talent, or by ele-

vation of rank, and several by both. Had not circumstances changed the plan of my excursion, I would have endeavoured to renew at *Cantly the colloquial pleasures I tasted with you at Buxton. They were lively, interesting, and sweet. —I have not yet read, but I mean to read, the work of our acquaintance, Mr Wilberforce, though what I hear of it does not violently sharpen my curiosity. Those over-strict preceptors injure the cause they labour to promote. Their books have a tendency to make young people sigh, and despair of becoming religious characters, when they find how rigid a mode of conduct, what eternal restraints upon enjoyments, generally thought guiltless, are asserted to be necessary for its attainment, nay, even necessary to avert the impending judgments of God.

There is a comic song which well burlesques these gloomy religionists, who, like Mr Gisborne and his friend, tilt their rusty lances against the innocent as well as guilty pleasures. Its burden, "Let us all be unhappy together." It concludes,

> "Then since we must all of us die,
> Let us taste no enjoyment while living."

I contemplate with delight the interesting con-

* The seat of —— Childers, Esq. near Doncaster.—S.

versations between yourself and your new daughter;—that union of principles, that congeniality of taste, which, where they exist, produce affection, animate intercourse, and counteract disparity! Your mutual friendship will resemble that between Madame de Sevigné and Madame de Grignan.

It must be confest that such attachment is very uncommon, and requires to produce it a rare ascendance, in the younger party, of mind over the animal spirits. A certain married couple of rank have an only daughter, lovely in her person, and who, at the blossoming age of nineteen, and with great vivacity of character, turns with disgust from the formal circles and senseless dissipations of fashionable life. She pants to devote a large portion of her youthful leisure to a participated study, with kindred Intellect, of our historians, our oratoric moralists, and our poets. Partial in the extreme to my writings, though our interviews have been very few, she loves me with fervour. Her mother is absurd enough to oppose the attachment, as it were criminal, and to ridicule, as meanly romantic, her averseness to annihilate time in vapid ceremony.

Ah! I am convinced that parental tyranny, either through the love of power, predominating over tenderness;—through the influence of pride

and ambition, or through the gloomy strictness of Calvinistic devotion, produces much unnecessary misery, and clouds with the irksome sense of slavery, the soft gay morning of youth;—that it eventually leads to ruinous misconduct, when the natural desire of freedom from restraint so painful, makes young women seize the first opportunity of Hymeneal emancipation from parental despotism;—regardless of their hearts indifference, perhaps averseness, and considering only the wealth which may give to personal self-government, and the command of time, the power of wasting it in the splendid crowds of fashionable levity. Like the French nation, unused to rational liberty, they will rush into licentiousness.

Were I a mother, instead of adopting Mr G.'s and Mr W.'s voluminous number of penal laws for the souls of youthful females, I would substitute the following exertions. I would induce them to be religious, by applying the Christian system rather to their hopes than to their fears. I would endeavour to inspire them with an high sense of virgin honour and truth, and of the grace and beauty of rational decorum—with a terror as well as abhorrence of female libertinism, by placing before their eyes, from real life, strong instances of its misery;—while, by every opportunity of judicious ridicule, I would inspire a sove-

reign contempt of male profligacy; of gamesters, sots, fops, and fox-hunters. Thus, instead of making myself and my daughters ridiculous, as Mr Gisborne advises, by demanding testimonials of the moral and pious character of every man who may ask them to dance a couple of dances at a ball, I should depend upon their principles and good sense for despising, instead of being corrupted by improper conversation, or indecent freedom in the momentary pauses of the dance;—attempts which it is in the utmost degree improbable that they should encounter, even from the most abandoned libertine. When the dance is over, by all the indispensable rules of fashionable life, every young woman takes her seat by her mother or chaperon.

I would very early introduce my daughters to the finest English writers, both in prose or verse, rather than devote all their leisure to the comparatively worthless acquisition of modern accomplishments. I would teach them to turn, with disgust, from the perusal of frivolous novels, not by invective, not by prohibition, but by early setting their taste above them, and this, by familiarizing their memory and mind with the two great works of Richardson, which involve all that can operate as warning and example; all that is elevated and beautiful in imagination, in wit, in elo-

quence, in characteristic discrimination and in piety.

Thus fortifying their understandings and their hearts, I would disdain coercion, and even teasing interference—every thing that wears the slightest appearance of suspicious watchfulness. So should their home be delightful; nor would an indiscriminating desire of leaving it for the married state, subject them to the danger of an unhappy marriage—while their habits of life and taste for literature, must preclude the discontents of celibacy, should celibacy be their lot.

All you write on the subject of your oceanic enthusiasm, peculiarly gratifies *me*. What exquisite delights do they lose—and the word *they* comprehends the million—to whom sensations like these are unknown! Among my hundred sonnets, now ready for the press, but waiting the dawn of happier periods for their publication, there is* one so entirely in unison with the third page of the letter before me, that I am tempted to inclose it.

I hope our churlish summer and drizzling autumn have produced no lasting bad consequence to your health. We expected from this month a little golden influence of sunny morn and noon;—and behold it anticipates the glooms of November! Adieu!

* Ninety-fifth Sonnet.—*S.*

LETTER II.

Miss Ponsonby.

Lichfield, Oct. 30, 1797.

Be my beloved Miss Ponsonby and Lady Eleanor assured, that I consider Langollen Vale as my little Elysium. It is nowhere that my understanding, my taste, and my sentiments luxuriate in such vivid and unallayed gratification. Whether those arbitrary contingencies of life and health, which so perpetually deride our free-agency, shall propitiate the flattering wishes of my charming friends, or shall impel my next summer's course a less interesting way, is in the book of destiny. I do not presume to read its page, but I know whither my inclinations would point, and how prone they would be to adopt the language of Imogen, and exclaim, "accessible is no way but the Cambrian."

On my road home, imagination gave back to me the image of good Mrs Roberts in a tragi-comic situation, as I had several times, on my late visit, seen her, in the hours of baffled expectation; of chagrin for dinners and suppers, prepared in

vain, mixed with the more serious gloom of sisterly apprehension. She always remains till near dinner time in her very pleasant bed-room on the ground floor; and there, in her tristful days, I used to behold her, the large Venetian sash lifted up to its utmost extent, sitting in an arm-chair before it, in broad attitude, with contracted lips, wide eyes, and Ugolino brow, exactly opposite old *Castel Dinas Bran, which, separated only by that narrow glen, stood staring upon her in rigid opposition;—its dark mass, unsoftened by distance, frowning like herself, in dun cogitation. O! there was no desiring better sympathy, or a more twin resemblance between a matron and a mountain.

Yet do I chide my whimsical fancy for sporting, though but for a moment, with the slightest distresses of an heart so friendly and hospitable—with whatever gives the iron traits to a countenance, which, when all goes well, is open and affectionate. Alas! disease, embarrassment, anxiety, and mortification, not imaginary, but serious and severe, have gloomed at times one of the cheerfulest dispositions in the world, and somewhat

* The singular conic mountain in Langollen Vale, crowned with the bare and desolated fragments of the walls of the Castle.—*S.*

soured a temper, of which transient impetuosity, and a little jealous soreness, are the only faults.

> "Time o'er the form, oppress'd by woes,
> Treads with an heavy pace;
> Sweeps his broad scythe, and as he goes,
> Down falls the summer pride, and shews
> Worn nature's furrow'd face."

I congratulate you upon the victory our fleet has obtained over the "slow-ey'd sons of the marshy clime,"—the glum and treacherous Dutch. Whatever may be our still subsisting dangers, that of invasion melts away in this redeeming victory. I grieve that it has been so sanguinary. Uncle Toby exclaims, when the sarcastic comments of the sub-acid philosopher upon his military hobby-horse had roused into oratory the generally quiet simplicity of his imagination,—"Brother Shandy, it is one thing for the soldier to gather laurels, and another to scatter cypress." Alas for the quantity of cypress which this life-lavishing victory demands from the genius of Britain! The sun of conquest shone gloriously, but the dark umbrage covers the floods that roll beneath.

However, with the fears of invasion, vanishes also the disgrace of the late rebellion in our navy, and restored confidence in our best bulwark, gives

double welcome to the triumph. Now may British sailors exclaim, with Harry Monmouth—

> "Our reformation, glittering o'er our fault,
> Like to bright metal on a sullen ground,
> Doth draw more homage, and attract more eyes
> Than that which hath no foil to set it off."

But I hope there will be no more foils to contrast the tried valour of English seamen. It glows with inbred lustre, and wants not shades to augment it. Henceforth, I trust, they will never be found in self-contrast, but in the misconduct of our foes. Mr Sneyd of Belmont's two gallant sons have fortunately escaped unhurt from Duncan's action, so pregnant with wounds and death. I hope they will live among the number of the brave escaped few,

> "To stand on tip-toe when that day is named."

Yes, I was sorry to hear Mr Smith, so generally candid, intelligent, and ingenious, set up Homer in unapproachable greatness. His decision was surely, in that instance, the triumph of classic pedantry over classic judgment and literary patriotism. If only the works of one poetic writer were to be preserved from another Gothic devastation, he who, with Smith, should say that

one should be Homer, must prefer the discriminated and sublime descriptions of a score of heroes, who, Hector, Priam and Telemachus, excepted, are not much else beside heroes, to Shakespeare's masterly display of every character, every situation, and every scene in many-coloured life;—where all the subtle gradations between wisdom and folly, vice and virtue, are marked with super-human skill;—where imagery rises in sublimity which was never excelled, and where sense and sentiment are given with force that has not been equalled. To Shakespeare! who when he had exhausted real creation, drew imaginary existence, with its enchanters, witches, ghosts, moon-calf monsters, and dapper elves, in traits, of whose justness we have such intuitive conviction, as to establish their classes in our mind, distinctly as we can arrange those of lions and wolves, serpents and monkies.

If the works of two great poets were to be exempted, he who should name Homer, splendid bard as he is, for one of the two, must prefer the gay polytheism of the Pagan mythology, to the grandeur and moral purity of the deistic system, blended with that of the Christian;—the domains of Pluto to the superb horrors of the Satanic regions;—the small landscapes of the Grecian shores and seas, scattered over the Iliad and Odys-

sey, to the ampler delineation of the forests of Comus;—L'Allégro's peopled scenery;—Il Penseroso's lonely haunts;—the gardens of Eden;—the glories of Creation;—the six days works of God.

We heard, when I had the honour of being your guest, another assertion, curious as Smith's was pedantic—but less extraordinary, as it harmonizes so much better with the abilities of the assertor, that doughty son of Themis, who, whenever he smiled, crumpled up his broad face like an half-toasted pikelet—he, you know, maintained that Peter Pindar's serious verses stampt him the first poet of his day!!!—And since I came home, a youth of the pragmatic tribe, from Derby, pronounced that Mrs O'Neal's sweet little Ode, to the Poppy, thirty-six lines out of its number, forty-four, being beautiful, the next six poor, and the closing lines common-place, outweighed, in poetic merit, all the odes which have been written within these fifty years.—Veil your bonnets to the lady, Gray, Mason, Hayley, Chatterton, Burns, Coldridge, and Southey! Thus,

> "While some are wildered in the maze of schools,
> Some it makes coxcombs, Nature meant but fools."

I have been fortunate enough in procuring ano-

ther copy of Romney's *Serena, which I mentioned to you as having accidentally formed a perfect similitude of my lost Honora Sneyd's face and figure, when she was serenely perusing the printed and unimpassioned thoughts of others. To the varying glories of her countenance, when she was expressing her *own*, or listening to the effusions of genius, no pencil could do justice. But that sweet, that sacred decency, that reserved dignity of virgin grace, which characterized her look and air, when her thoughts were tranquil, live in this dear portrait, while the turn of the head and neck, and every feature, reflect hers, as in a mirror.

The plate is now become so scarce, that fortune has singularly favoured my attempts. It was procured in the country, and will be sent to London to be framed ere it travels to Langollen. The lively interest which you have each taken in her idea, excites my fervent wish that you should behold her as she *was*, in a lovely work of art, which recals her image

> "From the dark shadows of o'erwhelming years,
> In colours fresh, originally bright."

Yes, I am ambitious that her form should be en-

* His profile Serena, reading by candle-light.—*S.*

shrined in the receptacle of grace and beauty, and appear there distinctly as those of Lady E. Butler and Miss Ponsonby, are engraven on the memory and on the heart of their faithful, &c.

LETTER III.

COLONEL DOWDESWELL, of Shrewsbury.

Lichfield, Nov. 30, 1797.

I THANK you for the always wakeful remembrance of your annual present. It arrived in taintless preservation the day of my return from Birmingham; whither I had been allured by a generous concert, every professional man performing gratis, in honour of the gallant Duncan's victory, and for the benefit of the women and children, widowed and orphanized, alas! by the obstinacy of Dutch resistance. Great part of the music was appropriate and good, and the band was numerous and able. Mr Saville's "Rule Britannia," chorussed at once by the full orchestra and brilliant audience, produced the most sublimely exhilarating effect, and was encored. As he had other songs, which called forth all his

noble energies of voice and expression, I feared their effect upon his precarious health might be too trying; happily my fear proved vain.

During the last ten months, eighty French prisoners have resided in Lichfield, with the wisest quietness—with the most uncomplaining patience. On their first arrival, and indeed long afterwards, they could not pass our streets without being brutally reviled by our populace; but they reviled not again. Though several of the officers were men of graceful manners and enlightened minds, yet by no family of this city, mine and the Simpsons excepted, were they in the smallest degree noticed. So little impression did compassion for their fate, or the involuntary testimony that could not be withheld to their unoffending manners, make upon the indurated hearts of our affluent gentry. The Simpson family and myself strove to cheer, by kindness and a little hospitable attention, the bitter hours of their exile.

On Monday a sad edict arrived from our government, which sent them away the next morning on foot, and under a convoy of cavalry, beneath these severely wintry skies, to pass the freezing nights of their cruel journey on coverless straw; and, on its close, to find themselves in an unwholesome jail at Liverpool, destitute of all the comforts of existence. This dire lot is undoubt-

edly that of many of our own officers, nursed in the lap of ease and luxury.

O! this horrid, this remorseless war! Infatuated ministry! who have rejected so many opportunities of terminating it, with honour and advantage to this deceived country;—on the taking of Toulon and Valenciennes; on the desertion of Prussia; on the subsidiary claims of the emperor; —yet still they went on, regardless of our exhausted wealth, of the miseries of a bleeding world; floundering deeper and deeper in defeated projects, till the olive, with all its healing blessedness, is perhaps no longer within our reach. Yet it ought to have been tried, if it could have been procured even by the sacrifice of that (no longer great) title, King of France; by the restitution of the Toulon ships, and by the cession of all our foreign conquests, whose advantages are as dust in the balance against the miseries of protracted war. Peace is worth any price to England, short of the reduction of her navy. In another twelvemonth we shall offer the recently rejected terms, and then offer them in vain. So it has been through the whole progress of this mad contest. Nothing but the blindest prejudice can prevent the public from being universally sensible of that melancholy truth.

I have perceived the drowning hopes of Mr

Pitt's adherents catching at the straw respecting English safety,—another rupture between France and Spain, regardless of the renewed miseries of the harassed continent.

By stimulating Portugal to break her treaty with a foe she has not power to resist; by stimulating Spain to make a second helpless attempt at resistance, what are the mole-eyed cabinet of England about, but to bring the claim of new enormous subsidies from us,—perhaps the claim of auxiliary armies, to be sacrificed as they were in Germany? and, after all, as the event must evidently be (if there is any eye-couching power in experience), to throw both those kingdoms into the absolute power of France, as conquered countries; while, by wiser capitulation, Portugal might retain the power of trading with England.

Lawless power will demonize its possessors in every country. It has demonized the French; but the French character has risen greatly in my estimation, from the exemplary conduct of our late unfortunate prisoners.

Without intending it, I have slid into politics. In a period so momentous, their attraction, to thinking minds of both sexes, is resistless.

LETTER IV.

Mrs Gell.

Lichfield, Dec. 3, 1797.

I have lately suffered, during a week, all I underwent in the summer, from a severe return of my hemorrhage. My appearance became again a rival spectacle of horror to "the blood-boltered Banquo," whose visibility the silly foppery of modern refinement has banished from the stage, to the great injury of the noblest tragedy in the world. Absurd!—that our feelings, which tolerate scenic witches, should be revolted by the sight of a scenic ghost.

Do you not pity me?—think of awakening from imperfect slumber, with streams of bood running down my throat, and threatening suffocation, till, on my starting up, they found a less fatal channel, and deluged my pillow! You will conceive that such visitations, by the glimpses of the moon, made the night hideous; but while I have bled, dear Mrs H. has died! I understood that she had obtained the pleasure of your acquaintance. We met at Derby last spring. She then appear-

ed in the strongest-possible health. Never was there a firmer constitution. I have not known her to complain of bodily indisposition. She had a Gallic gaiety of spirit, which the infelicities of her destiny could but transiently, however violently, impede. The short paroxysm of anguish passed, the tide of vivacity returned, and bore down every thing before it.

Nature, after striking off this one singularly characteristic impression, broke the mould in which she made Mrs Hayley.

Fire in her affections, frost in her sensations, she shrunk from the caresses even of the husband she adored. Hence, while she had a morbid degree of tenaciousness respecting his esteem and attention, she was incapable of personal jealousy; and would amuse herself with the idea of those circumstances, with which she could so perfectly well dispense, being engrossed by another.

Alike during the years of their union, and in those of their separation, she gloried in the talents of her bard, as she used to call Mr H., and delighted to praise his virtues, perpetually producing specimens of the first, and giving instances of the latter.

While her heart was warmly attached to the many whom she believed her friends—for to wish and to believe were twin feelings with Mrs H.—

while she could not bear, without visible pain and ardent vindication, the slightest word which had a tendency to question their pretensions to talent and virtue; yet, respecting strangers, or acquaintance that did not interest her, she had a quick sense of the ridiculous, which produced very pointed satire;—but, never tired of placing an absurd speech, or mean action, in new lights of ludicrous exhibition, the fertility of her imagination counteracted the fine edge of her wit, worked her theme thread-bare, and fatigued her auditors.

With sportive fancy; with no inconsiderable portion of belles-lettres knowledge; with polite address, and an harmonious voice in speaking, and with the grace of correct and eloquent language; with rectitude of principles, unsuspecting frankness of heart, and extreme good humour; she was, strange to say! not agreeable, at least not permanently agreeable. The unremitting attention her manner of conversing seemed to claim; her singular laugh, frequent and excessive, past all proportion to its cause, overwhelmed, wearied, and oppressed even those who were most attached to her; who felt her worth, and pitied her banishment from the man on whom she doated—in whose fame she triumphed, tenacious of its claims, even to the most irritable soreness. Yet her rage

for society, and excessive love of talking, were so ill calculated to the inclinations and habits of a studious recluse, as to render their living together inconsistent with the peace of either. However, while their separation was the quiet haven of his spirit, it was, unfortunately, a source of pain and mortification to her, though they, by no means, in their degree, amounted to the portion of discontent, which resulted from partaking his solitude. But Mrs H. had not, any more than our prime minister, that true wisdom which balances evils, and chooses the least.

Her unhappiness in the disunion, came on by sudden violences of sensation, like the grief of the Otaheiteans, who, when the thought of a lost friend occurs, start into agony, shriek, and wound themselves, and then, as instantly recovering, laugh, sing, and dance.

I am extremely curious to know how and why she died; as the event, simply announced in the newspapers, is all I know. If her intentionally blameless spirit slid out of existence by any of those countless doors which diseases and accidents open, her death will relieve Mr H.'s mind from much anxiety, occasioned by her total want of common-life discretion, and of economy;—yet had she no personal extravagancies, though a separate maintenance, with her thoughtless disregard

of pecuniary calculation, proved inconvenient to the but competent limits of her husband's income, and to the expence of keeping up his beautiful place, and its pleasure-grounds, to which he is enthusiastically attached. About a month ago, I heard, from a person to whom he had mentioned his intention, that he had determined to leave E———; through motives of prudence. Soon after I read her decease in the newspapers. I hope there was no self-violence*; but her strong health, the extreme, though transient bitterness with which she felt every new mortification, would prevent my being surprised, if information that her expences were likely to banish Mr H. from his beloved home, had produced a rashness. Alas! should it be so, Mr H.'s quiet will have received a careless wound. If not, he will be the happier for this removal.

Your letter to me, of September, describes a literary society, whose pleasures you seemed poignantly to taste, and to which, I know, your mind is congenial. This to Mr Saville paints an interesting and lovely retirement, with a force and beauty which charm us. The last letter breathes

* The author, soon after the date of this letter, had the satisfaction of learning that Mrs H. *died* of an epidemic fever, and that her fears of self-violence in the case had no foundation.—*S.*

happiness in your emancipation from the restraints and ceremonies of a mixed and extended intercourse. They are the provoking and outweighing counterbalances for the delights of intellectual commerce. We wander with you ideally over your mountain-walks, and through your forest-haunts; fully aware that an imagination like yours, can enjoy alike their summer loveliness and winter sublimity. If my frame had the elastic powers and strength of yours, I, too, should delight to breast the wintry winds, and to hear them booming through a leafless forest—to fancy I listened in their blasts, to the voice of former times, to the Druids of ancient Britain, yet hovering round their oaks, or to the Caledonian heroes, whose spirits are in the storms of the hill.

Nor less should I delight in the "neighbour nearness" of your naiad. Whenever I look earnestly on a river, my contemplation is thrilled, and presents its exhaustless stream,

> ——— "That flows, and yet will flow,
> Volume decreaseless, to the end of time*:"

Also the fertility and verdure of its placid course, and its formidable powers to desolate and destroy.

* My translation of a passage in Horace.—*S.*

A flooded valley, beneath the cloudy lour of a wintry moon, is one of those terrible graces in scenery, which the survey of danger, and the consciousness of protection, always form to people of strong imagination. I gaze with pleasing awe on the swoln, the extravagant, and usurping waters, as they roll over the fields, and, white with turbid foam, beat against the bushes.

This solemn luxury I can seldom taste, not having corporal power to seek abroad such scenes in the inclement nights which produce them; for of even the vernal and summer flood, miry ways are concomitant, and to feeble steps they are formidable;—but I have been in situations like yours, when my mind could thus luxuriate in the prospect of scenic desolation, unpurchased by fatigue, difficulty, or danger.

Here is a long letter; I hope it will not substitute the real sin of wearying, for the imaginary one of neglecting you. Farewell.

LETTER V.

THOS. PARK, ESQ.

Lichfield, Dec. 21. 1797.

VERY kind is your wish of consulting one of your London physicians on my case; but I have more confidence in those who have been long used to my constitution, and of whose skill I think highly:

> " My May of life
> Is fallen into the scar, the yellow leaf."

And many are the disorders which annoy its wane. The rheumatism which, in a less degree, has long lurked in my frame, and weakened my limbs, lately settled, with accumulated force, in the sciatic nerve of my right hip. During three or four days, I could not set my foot to the ground, without insuppressive screams, and the assistance of two people. I have used, several times a-day, as an embrocation, the pretended essence of mustard, to the efficacy of which there is such lavish testimony in the newspapers. I say *pre-*

tended, because my surgeon and we are all convinced, that it does not contain a single grain of mustard, and is merely oil of turpentine tinged with saffron, or something of that colour. Yet I think it has been of use to me, and, therefore, what it is matters little.

I am extremely interested in all you say of Thomson and his Seasons*. Nothing, in the study of the poetic art, could delight me more than to have the opportunity of which you availed yourself—than to trace, by comparing the first

* Extract from Mr Park's letter. "I very lately met with the early copies of the Seasons, as they were separately published; and from them I learn, that Thomson improved and polished his poetry with the skill and indefatigable diligence of Pope. These copies differ as much from the collected edition in 1730, as that does from its expanded successor in 1746. Dr Johnson hesitates to pronounce whether, in these subsequent editions, the poems did not lose their race in flavour. This appears equally strange with many other of that learned critic's critical enigmas. It is hardly possible that he could speak from actual comparison, since Summer and Winter appear mere school-boy efforts, after perusing the modern copies. But it is always an interesting exercise to compare the first sketches of a great master with his finished productions. Winter, instead of being disregarded, as tradition reports, passed through four editions soon after publication; a success that, with all its excellence, I do not think it would have obtained in the present day. Pope subscribed for three sets of the former edition, in the year 1730."—*S.*

edition of the Seasons with the two last, printed with corrections, under his own eye, in 1730, and 1746—than to trace, in that comparison, the rising powers of the poet's fancy and judgment.

The only instance I know, where a fine poetic writer has injured in attempting to improve his compositions, is Akenside. I have the first edition of his Pleasures of Imagination, written between his twentieth and thirtieth year, bound up with his last altered edition, published in middle life. The poem, in its altered state, has indeed lost an immense portion "of its race in flavour." It seems, that the cold precision of mathematic studies had not only dampt the fires of its author's fancy, but had rendered his judgment obtuse.

For Dr Johnson's having, to the disgrace of his judgment, pronounced, or rather suggested, the same censure on Thomson's alterations of his Seasons, by which they acquired a superiority so immense, I can thus account: He read them, on their first appearance, before his own sensibility of poetic beauty became warpt and blunted by literary jealousy and envy. He looked into the later editions, not read them, when those passions, so often the bane of authors, and, of all authors, most *his* bane, had jaundiced the native health of his mind. He remembered the pleasure with

which he had, in his youth, perused the earlier copies, and falsely placed to the poet's account that future palled and sickly perception, to which the meridian of Thomson's genius could not impart the delight, which its fainter dawn had inspired, when his own mind and taste were pure.

After Johnson rose himself into fame, it is well known that he read no other man's writings, living or dead,* with that attention without which public criticism can have no honour, or, indeed, common honesty. If genius flashed upon his maturer eyes, they ached at its splendour, and he cast the book indignantly from him. All his familiarity with poetic compositions, was the result of juvenile avidity of perusal; and their various beauties were stampt upon his mind, by a miraculous strength and retention of memory. The wealth of poetic quotation in his admirable Dictionary, was supplied from the hoards of his early years. They were very little augmented afterwards.

In subsequent periods, he read verse, not to appreciate, but to depreciate its excellence. His first ambition, early in life, was poetic fame; his first avowed publication was in verse. Disappointed in that darling wish, indignant of less than first-rate eminence, he hated the authors, preceding or contemporary, whose fame, as poets, eclipsed his own. In writing their lives, he gra-

tified that dark passion, even to luxury. The illiberal propensity of mankind in general, to be gratified by the degradation of eminent talents, favoured his purpose. Wit and eloquence gilded injustice, and it was eagerly swallowed*.

Thomson lived in better times. There were, doubtless, many as willing, but none so able as Johnson, to spread the Gothic mantle over poetic taste. Verse, even superior to Thomson's,

* Miss Seward's strictures, in this and some of the preceding letters, on Dr Johnson's character as a critic, may, to many readers, appear perhaps to be carried too far: yet they have lately received a sanction from a writer of the highest authority, whose candour is no less conspicuous than his penetration or his eloquence, and whose situation precludes him from all suspicion of being here influenced by local prejudices. It is in the following fine strain of moral indignation that Mr Stewart expresses himself upon this subject.

"Among our English poets, who is more vigorous, correct, and polished than Dr Johnson, in the few poetical compositions which he has left? Whatever may be thought of his claims to originality of genius, no person who reads his verses can deny that he possessed a sound taste in this species of composition; and yet how wayward and perverse, in many instances, are his decisions, when he sits in judgment on a political adversary, or when he treads on the ashes of a departed rival! To myself (much as I admire his great and various merits, both as a critic and as a writer), human nature never appears in a more humiliating form, than when I read his *Lives of the Poets;* a performance which exhibits a more faithful, expressive, and curious

would not thus speed through multiplied editions now.

The dire and inevitable consequences of this crusading and subsidizing war, are beginning to press heavily on the people. Requisition is commenced. Mr Pitt may have occasion to rue the obstinate and unwarned rashness by which he has put the safety of these realms into peril so imminent. Yet the demonstrated Quixotism of his attempts to balance the power of Europe, at a price so ruinous to Great Britain, did not prevent their being sanctioned by a large majority of the people of property. They could not be taught to feel that momentous truth, viz. that public distress and poverty, resulting from the exactions of the state, form the real and sole cause of overturned empires. In their approbation of measures that must bring on these exactions, they shook the pillars of ours, far more dangerously

picture of the author, than all the portraits attempted by his biographers; and which, in this point of view, compensates fully, by the *moral* lessons it may suggest, for the *critical* errors which it sanctions. The errors, alas! are not such as any one who has perused his imitations of Juvenal can place to the account of a bad taste; but such as had their root in weaknesses, which a noble mind would be still more unwilling to acknowledge."——Philosophical Essays, by Dugald Stewart, Esq. p. 491.

than Jacobin principles, while the people were easy and their property safe, could ever have shaken them. Misery is restless, and naturally rushes on change, at every hazard of changing bad to worse. Peace, state-economy, and a more liberal tolerance extended to the Christian sectaries in both islands, would have enabled government securely to have scorned the dread of Jacobin principles, so justly, so odiously characterized by atheism, tyranny, slavery, and murder. But, to shun that imaginary danger, we have embraced the prophecied and increasing perils of the present hour. Every rising day witnesses my prayers for their dispersion! Adieu.

LETTER VI.

DAVID SAMWELL, ESQ.

Lichfield, Dec. 31, 1797.

I THANK you for the amusing particulars of your summer's tour in your native principality. The grateful enthusiasm of the Cambrian Tonsor delights me. Such warm veneration for the unbeheld possessors of distinguished intellect, or virtue,

evinces congenial elevation and nobleness of mind. I love your ingenuous confession, that his tribute of unconscious praise gave you pleasure. Horace, in the Ode to Melpomene, avows the value he sets upon such artless proofs of admiration.

In climes and periods, and such there have been, in which reverence of existing genius is prevalent amongst people of education, not only rustic minds, rich in the native vigour of thought and perception, but even the stupid many catch, from their superiors, a portion of this reverence. They wonder and exclaim, with a foolish face of praise, and, like the Romans in Horace's time, point out to strangers their celebrated countryman, in whose fame, by local affinity, they conceive themselves in a degree honoured.

That period in England is long past away. I am glad that it still prevails in Cambria. The fastidious coldness of the higher classes to living genius, keeps the vulgar in ignorance of its claims to distinction. Where the sun of celebration has not shone, there can be no rainbows.

Is it possible that Wales may justly boast the greatest poetic genius of an age that has been so rich in that rare emanation? What! transcend the Burns of Caledonia? the English miracle, Chatterton?—and even equal Shakespeare! Unless you are immeasurably partial, why are powers

of such magnitude locked up from general approach, and confined to a language which, from the insurmountable difficulties, when infancy is past, of acquiring it, never can overleap the local bounds, except by means of translation. You who write English verse with facility and elegance, should emancipate the Cambrian muse. I must not hear from you the cant of pedants about untranslatable excellence. That excellence can be only verbal, and consequently not first-rate, the mere felicities of expression, evaporating in transfusion, which the chemic powers of genius cannot convey, with undiminished force, into another language. All the grand poetic constituents are transmutable,—as pathos of sentiment, strength and magnificence of thought, allusion, metaphor, simile, and imagery. If your Edwards possesses these intrinsics, convince us that he does, and teach us to admire him, as the German writers teach their countrymen to admire the boast of England, to whom you venture to compare your Cambrian.

If I have doubts of that country producing the greatest poet of this age, I have none that it has produced the finest harper in Europe. Randall of Wrexham is the Meonides of the pedal harp, not more kindred to that bard in the doom of ocular darkness, than in the richness and variety of

harmonic fancy,—the alternate grandeur and delicacy of tones, and the wanton heed and giddy cunning of execution. Mr Saville has persuaded him to come over here for a benefit concert next week. He will be my guest; and Mr S. is straining every nerve to fill the room, for a man whose genius and art illuminate the eternal darkness of his destiny.

You make me long to know the Helen* of your native clime, who has ripened her intellectual blossoms into such rich fruit, beneath its rocks and mountains.

I cannot boast of my health; it has been subject to various depredations since I had the pleasure of adding personal consciousness to the long friendship of our spirits, ere the eye and the ear became partners of the compact.

O the times! the times!—their darkness gathers fast around us. Thus accomplish, one by one, the derided prophecies of the minority. Heaven grant they may not be fulfilled to their last letter!

The bells are ringing out the old year—an ancient but very unfeeling custom. It seems like revelling over the grave of a just departed friend;

* Miss Helen Lloyd, sister to the Rev. Mr Lloyd of Caerwys.—*S.*

and my heart recoils at the sound. The horizon disdains congeniality to such ingratitude;—its early darkness, its loud sighs, and its tears, pay a different tribute.—Why not reserve it to usher in to-morrow's dawn, with gladness that would not then, as now, have been unfeelingly anticipated? The sounds of clanging triumph may welcome, without reproach, the new-born year; and may it eventually prove worthy of the joy which shall hail its rising!—May it teem with occurrences which shall rescue the nation from its self-incurred perils!

LETTER VII.

Miss Ponsonby.

Lichfield, Jan. 29, 1798.

For how brilliant a letter in allusive wit, and in every sort of elegance, am I indebted to dear Miss Ponsonby. It came to sooth the sense of violent rheumatic pain and imprisonment. Earlier had I acknowledged a packet so welcome, but no sooner was I able to employ myself, than the Cambrian Orpheus, Randall of Wrexham, be-

came my guest. He staid near three weeks. During that period, no hour of sequestration could be obtained for my pen; I was not sufficiently recovered to anticipate in my uprising the winter's dawn, and from breakfast till dinner I had a constant succession of company to listen to the enchantments of the pedal harp, while musical parties, either at home or abroad, engrossed every evening.

Mr Saville took the whole management of the benefit-concert, which he had planned for Mr Randall, and spared no fatigue, no exertion, for the interest of his friend. Considering the luckless occurrence that week, of three smart weddings in the environs, detaining families who would otherwise have been there, the room was better filled than we expected. With breathless attention, succeeded by loud applause, the audience listened to lyric excellence, unrivalled surely in brilliant execution, and tasteful variation. My description of his powers in the Chester paper last week, you probably saw.

But I reproach myself for having commenced a second page before one sigh has breathed to my revered friends, for the untimely death of my dear correspondent, the amiable, pensive, intelligent, Miss Wingfield. Ah, yes!

"That gentle spirit hath aspired the clouds."

I do not think she was happy, though she would not acknowledge either sickness or sorrow. Like Shakespeare's Viola, "she smiled at grief," while she avoided the circles of the gay and the dissipated, and sought rather to lose the sense of disappointment amidst her books and correspondence.

Averse as I am to writing epitaph, from the exhausted powers of its narrow limits, I could not recollect that I had paid that tribute to the memory of her cousin, Miss Bagot, whom I had never seen, and be silent over the tomb of my friend. I inclose a copy.

Poor Mrs Morhall too!—the sable flag has spread wide over Shrewsbury. The surprise her announced decease excited, was stronger from the robust health of her complexion and frame. They were lavishly promissory of vital duration. The hospitalities and gaieties of that town will have an heavy miss of her taste, her exertion, and the liberal elegance of her table. She was a lively fashionable woman, with a kinder heart than generally belongs to that class of beings. Her husband idolized her, and his anguish on this event will at present be the keenest; but time has consolations for him, which it has not for that * good unfortunate man, whose "universal blank of

* Colonel Dowdeswell, who lived with Mr Morhall, from the time he was struck with blindness.

all creation's works," her cheerful and unwearied attentions cheered and gilded.

I am glad my poem on the future existence of brutes, yet unpublished, has found so much favour in your and Lady Eleanor's sight, and in that of your friends. Yet surely, as poetry, it is below the general level of my compositions. Animated description of what is, and metaphysic reasoning on what, from fair inference, must be, can have no pretence to vie with the creations of fancy on Delphic ground. If I was asked which of all my metrical compositions had, in my own opinion, the best right to pre-eminence there, I believe I should say my pictures of Erebus, in the extracts I sent you from my yet abortive Telemachus—in short, the whole episode of the descent of Orpheus. Its descriptions and supernatural imagery, while they are strictly classical, have no debts to any one of the ancient or modern poets, except for the mere names, local and personal, and to Ovid for the outline, and no more than the outline of the fable. Neither has my Atalanta and Hippomenes, in the same work, any more extensive obligation to that poet.

Accept my best thanks for the compositions which you took the kind trouble of transcribing with so much accuracy, and of ornamenting with so much taste. Earl Walter is another grand

imitation of Dryden's poetic paraphrase of Boccace's story of Theodore and Honoria. In one respect, Earl Walter exceeds its original. In Dryden's poem, the hunted lady's guilt is not imprinted on the reader's mind before her punishment commences;—therefore our detestation of her conduct is not strongly enough excited to prompt the stern vindictive smile of conscious justice, over a retributory doom so violent and severe. Of Earl Walter, our detestation is previously excited, and we enjoy the sufferings of a wretch who had been callous to pity, and deaf to the pleadings of mercy.

The versification of the Chace, alias Earl Walter, is often too rough and careless.

Hark forward! forward! halloo! ho!

cannot, as a verse, be endured by a nice poetic ear.

Spencer's Leonora is extremely superior in the construction of the verse, besides that its terrific features are more grand and original—and so indeed are several of the images in those extracts, from a paraphrase of the eleven-times translated Leonora, by the author of this poem, the Chace; with which extracts Mr Saville was favoured by your friends the Scotch ladies.

Your description of your valley, deluged by the late long-continued wetness, and of the power of your gentle gravelly elevation in its bosom, to digest all the rain the Heavens can afford it, delights me.

The gentlemen of the Staffordshire fox-hunt gave us a ball last week, which concentered all the rank, fashion, and beauty of the country, in one splendid focus. No assembly of such overflowing numbers and such brilliance, has been witnessed at Lichfield since our vicars hall was opened in my thirteenth year. The hunt uniform is orange. Every lady in the room that was not in mourning, wore her white muslin profusely decorated with ribbons of that glowing hue; and the female group resembled a large bed of mingled snow-drops and yellow crocuses, the floral harbingers of spring. Sir Robert Williams, the acting president, went through the ceremonies of the evening with the most attentive politeness. Like Ariel, he was everywhere, and "did his spiriting gently."

Mr Chris. Smith's song, with the Proteus power which the lover there assigns to his own spirit, is fancifully pretty, but more resembles the ingenious metaphysic conceits of the Italian, than the sombre wildness and daring strength of the German poetry, from which you say this song was

paraphrazed. His Monody on Mr Hanbury has many passages of great poetic beauty.

With affectionate devoirs to Lady Eleanor, and every sense of grateful attachment to you both, I remain, dearest Madam, &c.

LETTER VIII.

Mrs Jackson of Turville-Court.

Lichfield, Feb. 13, 1798.

Perfectly am I aware, my dear friend, that the paths you have lately trod were very thorny. The warpt structure of the human mind is generally sure to unveil its deformity when pecuniary interest and just principle point different ways. To a mind generous as yours, it is most irksome when instances of selfish depravity are forced upon the attention. That the conflict is past, that justice has fought successfully on your side, my whole heart rejoices.

I entirely comprehend those seeming opposites in your temperament, so well discriminated on the pages before me. In circumstances not very momentous, you would rather endure the depre-

dations of selfishness than disturb your tranquillity by contest, and the irksome investigation of human unworthiness. But, with abilities like yours, there must be potent energies, however they may slumber;—energies which, once roused, are capable of the most active resistance. Though they have triumphed, and you wish to procure for them their constitutional balmy slumber, it may not perhaps be suddenly in your power to lull them. If they have been victorious, they have also been wounded, and the soreness may possibly remain some time;—but it will never become, as in many dispositions it might, a misanthropic induration.—No—your heart overflows too plentifully with the milk of human kindness for such a consequence.

Now is the period in your existence, when maternal anxieties most crowd and press upon the heart,

> "When youth, elate and gay,
> Steps into life."

Ah! what a proof of the depraved laxness of general morals, when the universities are become scenes of more temptations to indolence, sensuality, and extravagance, than even the army itself! —yet so it is. I wonder not, however, that you

sigh over the choice of the sword for a beloved son;—nor yet that, on a *balance* of dangers, you find yielding to the ardent bias of a young mind of the lordly sex, the *least*.

It is consoling that the conduct of your eldest son, and his inclinations, coincide with your own, and that your girl and youngest boy are so promising. Miss Jackson attains the age of companionship. Much more comfort, much less anxiety results to a mother from female than from male children; since, "in the morn and liquid dew of youth," she can much better guard them from contagious blightings.

Turville-Court is not of very formidable distance. Is it impossible, or rather, would it be very inconvenient for you and Miss Jackson to circle hither on your way to Bath this spring? If obstacles can be subdued, announce to me the welcome victory, and enable me to make short count of the intervening period.

Finding the active medicinal waters above all drugs, vegetable and mineral, salutary to the long-inherent maladies of my frame, I must dedicate the meridian of the year to a residence near them. I am become a sad valetudinarian, with every appearance of health and strength. Of a course of dinners later than three o'clock, my injured digestion soon perceives the ill-consequence;

and if I cannot walk my two allotted miles diurnally, either in or out of doors, I become extremely indisposed—yet for such people as myself, in whom Health, Juno-like, dresses up a cloud in her semblance, there is little belief or pity when they complain. All of our class must die before our acquaintance, or even our friends, will think our disorders real.

My summer's excursion will not commence before the end of June. I wish it may, ere that period, be allowed me to bask in the intelligence of your eyes, in the benevolence of your smile, in the soundness of your understanding, and in the play of your fancy. So, for me, should the roses of friendship precede the roses of Flora.

Mrs Godwin's death shocked and concerned me—though I had no personal acquaintance with her.

Why did she die?—I mean by what disorder? she was young—and surely there must have been great strength of constitution as well as of spirit, when friendless and unprotected, and with a young infant at her breast, she roamed the northern regions of the continent! It is curious, that, after acknowledging herself to be a mother, she should sign herself by her maiden name, Wolstencroft, in a subsequent publication, without accounting for the peculiarity; nor less curious that

the author of the Rights of Woman, should, beneath the sense of inflicted cruelty, perfidy, and ingratitude, give way to those expressions of passionate and desponding tenderness, which we find so frequent in her tour. If her system could not steel her own heart, as it seeks to fortify that of her sex in general, we should at least have expected her to conceal the weakness, whose disclosure evinces the incompetence of all her maxims.

Mr Whalley has not written to me since I addressed you last, I therefore know not if he persists in the design of offering his play for representation. The fashion of the times is so hostile to tragedy, that a fine one has no chance of being welcomed; and the combined ignorance and arrogance of modern criticism on poetic subjects, has, as you well observe, a repulsive influence on the resolution of genius to publish its effusions. These delectable properties are finely displayed at the close of the Analytic Review for last month, where Pope is pronounced no poet, nothing more than an ingenious versifier; and the disrepute, into which it says his works are falling, is a proof of the critical acumen of the present period!!! It pronounces Gray and Mason creatures of art merely; —that this age has had no poetic felicity, and exempts only from the Gothic dullness of that decision, Darwin, Cowper, Burns, Mrs Barbauld,

and Peter Pindar ; which last it declares to have far outstript them and all his contemporaries, in serious as well as comic writing. It makes no mention of Chatterton, compared to whom Burns, with all his powers, considerable as they were, is but as a bright star to the sun. Mr Hayley's established poetic fame, with the rising splendours of Coleridge and Southey's muse, together with other omitted luminaries, that gild with redoubled rays the classic fame of England in this century, may forgive the owl that shuts its eyes on their light, since it mistakes the sunbeams of Pope for farthing candles. But is it not miraculous that a work of reputation could thus egregiously commit itself? It has talked well on philosophy, on politics, and on many branches of modern science; —why would the ingenious blind man turn simpleton and decide on colours?

You, who can discern, and delight in poetic excellence, are you deep in Coleridge and Southey? —How has this age teemed, how does it continue to teem with lyric genius, while those idiots, the critics, shut their eyes on the golden harvest, and call it barrenness.

The above mentioned complete burlesque on verse-analyzation, can see no beauty in the tender ballads and elegies of Shenstone, with all their coy elegance and unobtrusive charms—Shenstone!

who has struck the true pastoral chords, which Virgil and Pope missed, by want of simplicity —by making their shepherds scholars and courtiers; and Gay and Phillips, by vulgarness— by making theirs mere clowns and rustics. Shenstone loved, and lived the pastoral life he drew— with a mind highly cultivated by classic education, he literally tended his sheep, his bees, and his flowers, and nursed in retirement the tender and natural sentiments of a love-impressed heart. They will find an echo in every bosom susceptible of the power of enamoured passion, and of the coyer charms of poetry.

He lived in happy times, when England was wise and great, the arbitress of Europe, at leisure to investigate the claims of classical talents; and the claims of Shenstone, genuine as they were modest, passed not away without their fame. National danger, with all that clamour of dissonant opinion which it excites, drowned not the tones of his silver lyre.

How different is this dark and turbid period! Do you not tremble at its prognostics? Is not the impending gloom dense—is it not palpable?— yet *they* remain at the helm, who, against the clearest and most awful warnings, continued the state-vessel in the stormy sea of hopeless war, when the pacific ports were repeatedly open for

its admission. Now no port is in view. Whom, or what are we to thank that there is none, but ministerial obstinacy and ambition, abetted by national pride and credulity? We have no prospect of peace under Mr Pitt's administration. The goad on the mind of the gamester is not more persisting than his lust of war. Heavy losses, and the prospect of utter ruin, force on each the paroxysms of repentance, and resolutions to abjure their vice;—but they have no permanence;—the least gleam of trifling success revives the rage.

In one of those paroxysms, Mr Pitt first sent Lord Malmsbury with the olive-branch. The Archduke gained a few skirmishing victories, and he and his party concluded instantly that the French would be beat out of Germany, and finally subdued. Peace, therefore, was to be rendered impossible, by making an impossible demand its indispensable preliminary. England claimed the Netherlands, of which France was in possession, and which, without idiotism, she could not relinquish. She rationally asked our minister what business, under that restriction, he had in France, and dismissed him;—and the nation, the majority of the nation, were mad enough to rejoice that the negotiation failed.

If the present madness of the French about in-

vading us continue, I trust to God it will be defeated, with heavy loss and disgrace to them; the disappointment, and the pacific wishes of that nation at large, may then induce its tyrants to offer reasonable terms of conciliation, and peace, which, if we had a wiser ministry, might yet be ours;—but Mr Pitt will then cry aloud to pursue our good fortune;—will tell us that it is reserved for England to restore the balance of Europe, and the majority of the nation will believe in him again, as they believed in him heretofore—will deem it disaffection to their country, and arrant jacobinism, when the voice of wisdom shall again protest against the arrogant, the ruinous pretence—shall once more exclaim, "O calumniated crusaders! how rational and moderate, in comparison, were your objects! O! tame and feeble Cervantes, with what a timid pencil and faint colours hast thou drawn the portrait of a disordered imagination!"

Thus will our devoted country pursue with avidity the sanguine track of its own destruction, and those only will be to be pitied, whose better sense disavowed the measures so visibly pregnant with mischief and ruin.

These are my prophecies, and I have only to wish and pray that a different fate may await them, to that which has accomplished, to their last letter, those predicted consequences of persisting in

the war after the desertion of Prussia and Spain. Our Pitt-devoted city derided them, as it now derides my present auguries. You will conclude it deems me democratic. I hear so—but not one of those who so calumniate me, more abhors the democratic system, and the tyrannies of France, than myself, and more deplores the subjugation of Europe to their demoniac influence. I cannot, however, forget the folly and madness on the part of the now oppressed, which gave to France the power of oppressing;—but no more on this hopeless theme.

Mr Saville, gratified by your kind mention of him, desires his compliments—politically he is with the insane,—but his heart is good, and his health better than it was last winter.

I read Mrs Robinson's volume of verses through, without perceiving a ray of genius. The above-mentioned Review, of stupid decision, attributes to her a poetic little gem of very fine water, addressed to the snow-drop. I hardly know how to believe it the progeny of a pen which I had found so languid, so mere a composer of lady-like verses. Adieu.

LETTER IX.

Rev. H. F. Cary.

Lichfield, March 4, 1798.

Lister has given me your Epitaph on Mason*. The leading thought is ingenious, and expressed with clearness, brevity, and classic elegance; but forgive me if I acknowledge that, while it appears happy as an epigram, I think the Muses, being a part of Pagan mythology, should not be introduced on a tombstone;—that no authority can sanction their admittance—that our machinery,

* *Epitaph on the Reverend* William Mason, *by the Reverend* H. F. Cary.

O'er the sad shrine, to Mason's relics dear,
Pure love, and faithful friendship, shed the tear;
Meanwhile the sacred Sisters, who inspire
The lofty song, the pencil, and the lyre,
At awful distance keep celestial guard,
And mourn their lost musician, painter, bard;
Thus, in dumb eloquence, the pensive host
Contend which lov'd him best, which charm'd him most.

in that line of composition, should be confined to personifying the talents and the virtues.

I return your Coleridge, and have purchased one myself. It would disgrace a poetic reader not to have him on their shelves. His ideas are bold, beautiful, and original. He is no cold copyist—Nature is the exhaustless volume he unclasps. In his style, perhaps, simplicity some times degenerates into a too studied homeliness of phrase; and he does not, in his blank verse, float the pause so gracefully as he might. From the latitude I have heard attributed to his morals, it surprised me to find his writings so deeply tinged with religious enthusiasm. Either he is a methodist, or an hypocrite. I hope it is the former His poem, entitled Religious Musings, thrilled me with horror. I tremble lest his prognostics there should be all in all accomplished. Good God! how that poem makes one shudder at the blasphemy of sheltering the exterminating spirit with which we have pursued this desperate war, under the pretence of defending Christianity!—Christianity was not attacked in these realms. If atheism and deism might blot it from the continent, nothing but war, whose events are always uncertain, could endanger it in these dominions, whose situation is insular, and whose navy is so powerful.

Coleridge's Ode on the departing Year, which, reading in the newspapers, I had disliked as turgid and obscure, is so much changed in this volume, as to impress me with a conviction of its being one of the grandest odes in our language. Such odes are the proudest, noblest boast of poetry, after the epics of Homer and Milton, and the dramas of Shakespeare. But, to return to the Ode on the departing Year. In this edition, its ideas are become luminous, as they were bold, and it has received very fine additions. So will it ever be, when true genius devotes it powers to correcting at leisure its hasty and crude essays.

Some four years since, Mr Coleridge's friend, Kennedy, gave me C.'s Monody on Chatterton in manuscript. On comparing it with that poem in in this collection, I have there also found great extension and improvement. In this monody, there is a picturesque half-line taken from my Elegy on Captain Cook,

> " Loud she laments, and long the nymph shall stray,
> With wild unequal step, round Cook's * morai †."

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* *Morai*, the monument for the dead in Otaheite.—*S.*

† Cook's Elegy.—*S.*

" With wild unequal step he pass'd along,
Oft pouring on the winds a broken song *."

The second line is verbatim from Ossian. I believe inequality of step, as symptomatic of an agonized mind, will not be found in any poet antecedent to my Elegy on Cook.

Charles Lloyd has fine poetic talents—his style is of the same school, and he may be considered as forming a poetic triumvirate with his friends Coleridge and Southey, much to the classic glory of England at this period; and confuting afresh the idiot assertion, made from time to time, concerning the paucity of Aonian inspiration in the seventeenth century, and the exhausted state of poetic fancy. Poetic fancy is exhaustless. Whoever possesses it from nature, and looks at her scenes, and all their endless varieties, with his own eyes, rather than applying to them the recollected descriptions of other poets; whoever moralizes and philosophizes life, and its events, from lynx-eyed observation and sensitive feeling, and, while he is writing, banishes all recollection of the writings of his predecessors, will always produce poetry interesting, nervous, and original.

* Coleridge's Ode to the departing Year.—*S.*

C. Lloyd is a very sweet sonnet-writer indeed—superior in that line of composition to Coleridge, and nearly equalling Southey.

Coleridge seems aware, in his Dissertation on Sonnets, in this volume, that the composition of them is not his forte. I have an idea, that what he there says of Petrarch's sonnets, is not very far from the truth. Judging of them by the translations and imitations of them, which I have seen, they want that pathetic simplicity which is the chief grace of love-verses, whatever form they assume. As sonnets, where the thought should be single, the ideas in Petrarch's are too complicated, too metaphysic.

It is curious that, overlooking Milton's, he should consider those of Bowles and C. Smith as models. Their construction of each set is so dissimilar, that the sonnet laws cannot be deduced from both. Bowles's are Miltonic, if not so strictly regular as are Milton's. All I have seen of C. Smith's, which are her first set, are merely short elegies closing with a couplet, and without any of those breaks in the lines, which are so very impressive.

You, at the tender age of fourteen, found the strict rules, as to rhyme and measure of the legitimate sonnet, no impediment to the effusions of

your fancy, and of your heart, or to the flowing sweetness of your verse *. We find all those rules observed by your juvenile muse, without any sentences of harsh inversion, any quaint phrases, or incongruous mixture of obsolete and Spenserian words.

I have published several from my Centenary of

* See Sonnets, published by Robson and Clarke, New Bond Street—their author, Mr Cary, then only sixteen years old. They are strictly legitimate, and confute every idle objection that can be made to that order of verse, by the grace and ease of their numbers. The 10th of those Sonnets is here inserted as a specimen.

To Mr THOMAS LISTER.

Deem not the muse officious, if thy brow
With her plain wreath to twine she fondly tries,
Since, though Art marshalls not the varying dyes,
Yet nature, sure, will bid the colours glow.
Up the steep hill we, arm in arm, will go:
The hill of life—whether dark tempests rise,
Or golden suns illume the laughing skies.
Thus oft we fram'd the amicable vow,
What time the friendly star of evening pale,
That o'er the dim grove casts its silver gleam,
Led our slow footsteps down the devious vale.—
O! may these scenes prove no illusive dream!
Nor let our simple lives together fail
To flow, one lucid and unruffled stream!—*S.*

Sonnets, which, for their hour of publication, awaits the return of public tranquillity, if it ever returns, to this nation, too justly alarmed by the approach of dangers it has provoked. I dare assert, that the regularity of their construction, after rules deduced from the Miltonic sonnet, is free from all the laboured harshness which Coleridge falsely supposes attached to that order of verse. What nonsense men of genius will sometimes talk!

But what say you to his strange inconceivable preference of Schiller's terrible graces to Shakespeare's?!!—as if the agonized feelings of Lear, houseless amid the peltings of the midnight tempest, uttering curses on his children, wrung from his tortured heart by filial ingratitude, was not a subject of as sublime and heart-piercing horror as the cry of a famished man, at midnight, from a cavern into which he had been thrown by a cruel son. Mr C. attributes approachless sublimity to that single circumstance—wishing that he had invented it—and died, that nothing less tremendous in conception might stamp him mortal. Let him open the thrilling pages of Lear, and he will find multiplied touches of as soul-harrowing horror and woe.

His assertion, in a note, page 88, of the unrivalled powers, among the poets of the present day, of Wordsworth's muse in poetic essentialities, in-

duced me instantly to send for his poems. I was extremely surprised, for it was a name I had not once heard of, though I find his poems had been published some time. This superiority which Coleridge assigns to them, is just as founded as the asserted superiority of Schiller to Shakespeare. Wordsworth has genius—but his poetry is harsh, turgid, and obscure. He is chiefly a poetic landscape painter—but his pictures want distinctness. It is strange that Mr C. should, in that note, attribute originality to Wordsworth's expression, *green* radiance, for the light of the glow-worm. That light is perfectly stellar, and Ossian calls the stars green in twenty parts of his poetry, translated and published, before Wordsworth, who is a very young man, was in existence.

I who had always, since I first in childhood began to observe the characteristic appearances of the objects of nature, seen the stars and the glow-worm effusing greenish beams, wondered, on my introduction to the muses, to find none of their votaries pointing out that tinge in the lustre of some of the largest and brightest, and in the light of the glow-worm. When Ossian came out, in my early youth, I was charmed to find him confirming, by his epithet *green* for the stars, the accuracy of my visual perception. The following lines are in my Langollen Vale:

> " While glow-worm lamps effuse a pale green light,
> Such as in mossy lakes illume the starless night."

Coleridge, like most other good poets, uses the compound epithet very lavishly, aware, no doubt, of its power to condense sense, and to present poetic picture with suddenness and force. He pretends, in his preface to this the second edition of his poems, that, in compliment to the reviewers, he has abridged the number of his compound epithets. That surely could not be, considering the great plenty of them in this same second edition. He was certainly laughing at the critics by the mock humility of this unreal lopping.

Charles Lamb, several of whose poems are in this volume, is of the school of Coleridge, Southey, and Lloyd, and no contemptible disciple—but while he imitates, he does not equal them. Adieu!

LETTER X.

REV. F. JAUNCEY.

Lichfield, March 13, 1798.

YOU inquire, with an air of triumph, as if our national perils were vanished, if I still persist in venerating the opposers of those measures which have drawn such perils upon us!!! Let my three notes of admiring marvel, answer the question.

If you like the present situation of these kingdoms better than that in which they were before this war commenced, when Britain was great among the nations, I do not. If that situation is really altered for the better, our ministry ought to be acquitted. If it is not, those who exhorted them to abandon hopeless projects—to quit a falling cause, when the first pillar * of the league gave way, were the friends of their country. So I have long thought, so I shall ever think, and such will be the universal opinion in a very few more years.

* Prussia.

As to the answers to Mr Erskine's book, with the rest of the voluminous receipts to wash white the ministerial Ethiops, I have no leisure to give them; however, I did read Mr Gifford's first book. He is an able sophist—but I have not lost my memory. Against the measures which, from her high and radiant prosperity, have humbled this nation to the state of unjust requisition, and of a mendicant begging shillings and half-crowns from lacqueys and washerwomen, all that Mr Erskine has collectively laid before the public was, from time to time, brought forward by the Hampdens, Sidneys, and Russels of the minority. Mr Pitt neither did nor could refute the accusations—he did not even attempt to refute them. Had Gifford's fabrications been facts, the minister would have brought them to light in his replies to the reproaches he met for rejecting the pacific advances of the French Directory, or rather, as it was then called, the National Assembly. He did not deny the existence of those wishes on the part of France, and he combated the solid arguments that proved how much it was the interest of England to entertain the same wishes, by nothing but the shallowest sophistries, and by arrogant demands to be trusted with unexamining confidence. The majority of the senate, and of the nation, did trust him; and of that trust they are

now beginning to reap the bitter, bitter fruits. If, in their pride and obstinancy, they call them sweet, much good may they do them—the hardship is upon those who would have averted those evils, and are now obliged to share them.

You clergymen, who ought to have exhorted pacific measures, have been deeply to blame in your contrary conduct; and if the dreadful and remorseless French, whose vengeance we have provoked, should revolutionize this unhappy country, the clergy will be the first to feel the dire effects of their own adjurations. This, once for all, is my political creed. I shall not be able to change your opinion, nor can you alter mine. Fruitless, therefore, is it to make the miserable situation of these kingdoms a farther theme in our letters. A few of those I best love think with you. I do not love them the less, though I wonder more and more at their infatuation.

In a lately published miscellaneous volume, by one of the first poets of this period*— a period so rich in poetic talent, so poor in poetic patronage, I met with the following inscription for a column

* Southey. He is, however, strangely mistaken in his assertion, that Hampden and Falkland fell in the same place. Colonel Hampden was killed in the battle of Chaldgrave Field near Oxford, and three months after Lord Falkland fell in the battle of Newbury.—*S.*

at Newbury. It should, at this time, be engraven on every heart, as an antidote to the venom and helpless violence of mutual animosity on political themes.

INSCRIPTION FOR A COLUMN AT NEWBURY.

" ART thou a patriot, traveller?—on this field
Did Falkland fall, the blameless, and the brave,
Beneath a tyrant's banners!—Dost thou boast
Of loyal ardour?—Hampden perished here,
The rebel Hampden!—at whose glorious name
The heart of every noble Englishman
Beats high with conscious pride. Both uncorrupt,
Friends to their common country both, they fought,
They fell in adverse armies.—Traveller,
If with thy neighbour thou should'st not accord,
In charity remember these good men,
And quell each angry and injurious thought."

YOU will expect a little Lichfield news. Louisa G., the elegant, the witty, the eccentric, the agreeable, is going to marry her clerical kinsman and namesake; of silence so inflexible and solemn. These contraries in choice are not uncommon—perhaps they are not unwise. Edgeworth used to say of two brilliant spirits of different sexes, " If that man and woman were to marry, they would skim the moon." One domestic sphere

would probably be too narrow to contain comfortably a couple of moon-skimmerss. Adio!

LETTER XI.

H. REPTON, ESQ.

Lichfield, April 13, 1798.

WHAT reproach in the date of your last? If read aright, October. I know not how to believe that so many months have elapsed since the gay smile of Mr Repton gleamed into my parlour, a little before he favoured me with this ingenious packet, and restored the darkly able volumes of Caleb Williams.

I grant the justice of all you say concerning the design of that work. It is highly censurable;—and also on the unavoidable incompetence of all legal institutions, entirely to protect the dependent and the poor from being oppressed in some way or other, by the powerful and the wealthy. Viewed on the political side, these pages are the effusion of a morbid irritability, impatient of human defect in our constitution, and libelling our laws. Considered as a delineation of character and man-

ners, it has an impressive, awful, and useful moral; displaying the mischiefs, the wickedness, and misery into which the boundless indulgence of an originally noble passion, may betray an amiable and highly liberal mind.

My acquaintance with the late gallant and murdered Colonel St George; the much I have heard of him from his intimate and long associated friends, convince me that the character of Falkland is, even in these cold days of renounced enthusiasm, not out of nature. All Orlando Falkland would have been, had not disgrace blasted his course, dear St George was.

I cannot help thinking Godwin knew him, and that his talents, his excellencies, and peculiar cast of manners, suggested to this author the idea of his hero;—so exactly do we find the portrait of St George's person, genius, virtues, and singularities, in the description of Falkland, when he was serene and full of hope, at peace with himself, admired and respected by all who knew him. The slender, almost effeminate, yet graceful figure;—that mixture of dignified reserve, interesting sweetness, high spirit, and varied intelligence, which so amply recompensed the want of manly features in a pale fair face; that exquisitely jealous sense of honour; that romantic elevation of intrepid sentiment, despising every danger, ca-

pable of every exertion, and patient of every suffering, except infamy.

Such was St George, and I can conceive the possibility of a mind thus tempered becoming demonized by what should appear to its feelings, deep, and, though undeserved, remediless disgrace.

It is the privilege of genius to place uncommon characters in situations of extreme trial, and intuitively to feel how, so placed, they would probably act. Remember Macbeth, once generous, humane, and brave, and be not incredulous to the apostasy of a Falkland.

The excess of crime into which Falkland plunges, to screen from public violation his idolized honour, is fearful, is terrible. You call it disgusting. *That* is a word utterly uncharacteristic of the shuddering interest with which it grappled my attention. Hypocrisy it certainly is; but, not being assumed as the veil of purposed future vices, but as the screen of one dire irrevocable fault, it is hypocrisy without the meanness which, in every other instance, real or fictitious, attaches to that vice.

Caleb's want of power to interest you in his character and hard fate astonishes me. You call him a rascal for having yielded to the ardour of his curiosity. If he had received a gentleman's edu-

cation, instilling the lofty and scrupulous notions of honour, such a violation of its principles might have deserved the harsh epithet. From a low-born youth, however endowed with native strength of intellect, we are not to expect them, and may well forgive the victory of an impulse so violent.

Then as to the perjury;—breaking an oath not voluntarily taken but desperately imposed, cannot, at least in the full extent, be deemed perjury. His long and patient forbearance to break it, beneath persecution so incessant and extreme, renders every resistance he makes to its violation, virtuous in an higher degree than the final yielding is criminal. Whether in reality or fiction, human frailty considered, we ought to remit one fault to many virtues, rather than sink many virtues in the recollection of one fault. It is the omitting thus to poise the scales of justice, which produces so much false appreciation of character in actual life.

Then how can you say Caleb breaks this imposed vow without compunction? You forget how violent his previous struggles, how strong his reluctance to make the accusation;—with what yearning remorse he was seized at the instant of bringing it forward, though not an act of revenge, but of self-defence. Does he not declare, that the remembrance of having made it must embit-

ter his remaining days, and produce even greater misery than had resulted from those unremitted persecutions, which had urged him to the disclosure of his once, his yet loved master's guilt?

It appears to me that the author of this unique amongst novels, possesses the power to place marked characters in such situations as shall induce them to act extraordinarily, without acting unnaturally. I know of but one error against the laws of fiction, to which the work is amenable;—the leaving undiscovered the mysterious contents of the chest. Doubtless it is the duty of every author of an imaginary history, to satisfy, ere his reader leaves him, the strong curiosity he has excited.

Your plan of a * fourth volume accomplishes this end, and is very ingeniously contrived;—but

* Mr Repton's *Sketch of a fourth volume to Caleb Williams.*

" Mr Falkland, to atone for his cruelty, makes Caleb his sole heir; and in a private letter, inclosed in the will, conjures him to destroy the fatal chest, without examining its contents. Another field for the display of his passions. After a violent struggle, his curiosity again prevails, and he finds a narrative of Mr Falkland's life—and two skeletons, of a female and child, which Mr F. had caused to be placed there, to conceal their murder, and as a perpetual memento of his own crimes:—these are a life of uniform deceit, uncontrollable passions, and utter disbelief in all religion. The narrative contains a

with me, it would destroy all the charm of the first volume. It is easy to draw a deep, designing, and uniform villain, with specious qualities. Such would Falkland be as the seducer of Miss Melville and the murderer of his own child. The

confession of having seduced Miss Melville, and by her had a child, whom he had caused to be murdered; and, for his own security, having destroyed his agent in that nefarious act; but, not knowing how to conceal the bodies, he had inclosed them in the iron chest, where, from gradual putrefaction, they had become skeletons. This putrefaction was the first cause of that sallow look and unhealthy symptoms, which always appeared after his visits to the trunk. In the course of the narrative, some warm descriptions occur of the delights he had experienced from his connection with Miss M. They excite new ideas in the breast of Caleb; for it has been justly observed, that where the whole of an animal's faculties are engrossed by the care of supporting existence, there is less passion for the intercourse of the sexes. Thus Caleb thought not of woman till this change in his circumstances;—but now the same ardour of spirit, the same energy of frame, are directed to new pursuits; and, being disappointed in his first attempt to form an honourable connexion with a lady, whose history furnishes an interesting episode, he by degrees loses his boasted integrity, and, at length, by the help of his large property, becomes the greatest oppressor to those who oppose his libidinous pursuits. From hence we learn, that the temptation of wealth is more powerful and dangerous than that of poverty, and that the only security against vice, is a well-grounded confidence in that Supreme Being, who witnesses all our actions. Human laws can never be so framed as to reach the secret sins of man. Power must always have some relation to wealth."

interest, and the original moral would at once be lost, and the whole design of the work subverted, by making Falkland a born fiend rather than a fallen angel demonized. Besides, in the former, such unremitting agony of remorse would be unnatural. The habitually hypocritic and cruel, never feel lasting remorse till the near approach of detection and punishment awakens it. Godwin, aware of that, exhibits the remorse of Tyrrel as a sudden electric shock of reproach and contrition—not, as in the long virtuous Falkland, an inconsolable, unsubsiding anguish. Tyrrel's repentance soon changes into rage and vexation over the consequences of his crime, the disappointment and mortification to his pride. He hates his neighbours for their abhorrence of his guilt, not himself for its perpetration.

You have seen this author's Memoirs of his wife—the famous authoress of the Rights of Woman. It is the fashion to abuse him for them violently. Bearing strong marks of impartial authenticity as to the character, sentiments, conduct, and destiny of a very extraordinary woman, they appear to be highly valuable. Since, on balancing her virtues and errors, the former greatly preponderate, it is no disgrace to any man to have united his destiny with hers. Nor can he be justly blamed as exposing the frailties of his wife,

since, in her admired northern tour, she acknowledges herself a mother by Imlay, to whom she could not have been a legal wife, as he was known to be living when she married Godwin.

To reveal the motives on which she had acted; —to paint the strength of her basely betrayed attachment to that villain Imlay, was surely not injury but justice to the memory of a deceased wife.

I have but one fault to find with these Memoirs. It is, however, a great one—the needless display of his own infidelity as to revealed religion, and his seeking to involve her in the scepticism by implication, not by proof, since he allows she was habitually and fervently devout. Why then should he expose her to the censure of irreligion from the mass of mankind, who imagine God can be worshipped effectually in no way but their own?

I must not say farewell, without inquiring after the Muse of Landscape, and expressing my hope that the number of votaries who seek her shrine, and you, her high-priest, does not abate at the grin of those monsters in finance, the assessed taxes.

LETTER XII.

THE RIGHT HON. LADY ELEANOR BUTLER, AND MISS PONSONBY.

Lichfield, April 24, 1798.

THE frame for Honora's exact, though accidental, resemblance in the print of Romney's Serena reading by candle light, is at length arrived. I dare believe my charming friends will think the figure, countenance, and features, express the sweetness, intelligence, and grace, with which the strains, honoured by their mutual partiality, invest the fair friend of my youth.

You must each have been deeply disquieted by the miserable scenes which have been acted in your native Ireland since I had last the honour to address you. None of your particular friends are, I trust, on the dire list of those who have fallen the victims of its assassinations. Had my gallant friend, the murdered Colonel St George, the happiness of your acquaintance?—Of him at least you must well know, from your

intimacy with his lovely and accomplished sister-in-law.

My Telemachus has taken a snail's walk since I gave myself the pleasure of writing to you. Two mornings of leisure, the only ones I could obtain in the interim, produced the inclosed extract. You have heard me say, that I could scarcely ever persuade myself to admit the muses, in exclusion of any social or epistolary duty or pleasure. Small, therefore, with connections and correspondence so numerous, is the probability that I shall ever finish an epic poem.

You will perceive that Fenelon's Telemachus forms as yet but the mere basis of this attempted work; but I conclude, that when the prince, in what will form my third book, narrates his own adventures, I must be more indebted to the prose composition. Whether those incidents, not very interesting from Fenelon's pen, are capable of receiving poetic spirit and animation from mine, remains to be tried. If I retain my excursive manner of going over the ground, there will be sufficient length for an epic poem, without pursuing the long train of less animated events that ensues after Telemachus and Mentor quit Calypso's island. Homer follows not Achilles when he leaves the ruins of Troy; and if Virgil had

not followed Æneas after he left Carthage, his poem, though less complete, would have been more interesting. After the death of Dido I yawned through the remainder; read it once as a task, and never since looked into the pages beyond that epoch.

Ah! dearest ladies, how groundless has the assertion proved on which every one relied, that Duncan's victory threw the perils of invasion at a wide distance!—but I will not pursue the alarming subject.

This day a summer's sun warmly gilds the fields, the gardens, and the groves, now diffusing fragrance, and bursting into bloom. Fresh and undulating breezes from the east lured me into my drawing-room, having placed in its lifted sash the Æolian harp. It is, at this instant, warbling through all the varieties of the harmonic chords. This apartment looks upon a small lawn, gently sloping upwards. Till this spring, it was shrubbery to the edge of the grassy terrace on its summit; but I have lately covered it with a fine turf, sprinkled with cypresses, junipers, and laurels. It is bordered on the right hand by tall laburnums, lilachs, and trees of the Gelder rose,

———" throwing up, mid trees of darker leaf,
Its silver globes, light as the foamy surf,
Which the wind severs from the broken wave."

Beyond this little lawny elevation, the wall which divides its terrace from the sweet valley it overlooks, is not visible. These windows command the loveliest part of that valley, and only its first field is concealed by the sloping swell of the foreground. The vale is scarcely half a mile across, bounded, basin-like, by a semicircle of gentle hills, luxuriantly foliaged. There is a lake in its bosom, and a venerable old church, with its grey and moss-grown tower on the water's edge. Left of that old church, on the rising ground beyond, stands an elegant villa, half shrouded in its groves; —and, to the right below, on the bank of the lake, another villa with its gardens. The as yet azure waters are but little intercepted by the immense and very ancient willow that stands opposite these windows in the middle of the vale; that willow, whose height and dimensions are the wonder of naturalists. The centre of the lake gleams through its wide-spread branches, and it appears on each side like a considerable river, from its boundaries being concealed. On the right, one of our streets runs from the town to the water, interspersed with

trees and gardens. It looks like an umbraged village, and is all we see from hence of the city, so that nothing can be more quiet and rural than the landscape. It is less beautiful in summer than in spring, from the weeds that sprout up in the lake, and from the set which partially creeps upon its surface.

In my youth, it was always clear—but it is said that, some fifteen years back, two of our gormandizing aldermen took a boat and sowed it with water-lilies, to preserve the fish. The mischief is irreparable, since the cleansing it receives every autumn only procures transparence till the sun of middle summer enables the deep-rooted weeds to defy the scythe and the shovel.

What shall I say for the slovenliness of the inclosed transcripts?—Thus you behold my incorrigible pen sinning, from time to time, against the fairness of transcription,—sinning and confessing, like a frail papist, and repenting without amendment.

What lovely weather!—Our valley is bursting into bloom, and the fruit trees of a large public garden in one part of it, now in full blossom, presents a grove of silver, amidst the lively and tender green of the fields and hedge-rows. Alas! the melancholy of the apprehensive heart is rather increased than abated by this vernal luxury. It

seems but as gay garlands on the neck of a victim. —In every frame of mind, I remain, dearest ladies, &c.

LETTER XIII.

THOMAS PARK, ESQ.

Lichfield, May 10, 1798.

THANK you for this renewed proof of obliging attention, in sending me Thomson's Winter, published in the year 1730. Since I wrote to you, I discovered amongst my father's old books, the Four Seasons, three of them published at different periods, though bound up together. The three first bear the same date with those in your collection, viz. Spring, 1728—Summer, 1727—Autumn, 1730—and Winter, 1730; of which last the book that you have presented to me is a duplicate. Therefore I purpose returning it, that you may present it to some other poetic amateur of your acquaintance, who may not possess, and might find difficulty in procuring, this interesting proof of the progressive powers of the fancy and the judgment in so fine a writer; which appears from comparing it with

the Winter of the last edition he revised of the Four Seasons, that republished by Dr Aikin, in 1779, and to which the editor prefixed that admirable dissertation on the poetic powers of those compositions.

The Winter, in your collection of the earlier editions, is a fourfold treasure in our comparative investigation, from its four years precedence, being published in 1726. It would gratify me to examine it; and if you indulge me, it shall be punctually returned. The climax of excellence, on the whole, is so considerable, from the Winter published in the year 1730, to the same poem which received the poet's last touches, that if the inferiority in that of 1726 to that of 1730, is, as you say it is, in equal degree, you might well call the first a school-boy's task, compared to the consummate poem.

I have been extremely amused in examining my father's book of the early editions, and my own of the latest, presented to me by a friend in my fourteenth year. For this amusement I am entirely indebted to your observations on the subject. The examination has explained to me a circumstance, on which I have often, through life, with wonder meditated:—thus—my dear father was himself an elegant poet, though too devoted to society to give up much time to poetic composi-

tion; while, like his daughter, he shrunk from the trouble of publishing what he had written, and, with more carelessness, lost the copies. In the beautiful works of other poets, he was an unprejudiced and generous enthusiast. The only instance which ever appeared derogatory to the poignance of his taste, and the soundness of his judgment, in that enchanting science, was on the subject of Thomson's Seasons. He acknowledged the genius of their author, and that they were accurate and vivid pictures of nature; but asserted, that their style was frequently turgid and obscure, and that he often met with epithets which rather encumbered than strengthened their substantive.

I now conclude, that he had read the Seasons in their early copies only, and probably his criticism was just; while to me, who had only perused them in their improved state, it seemed injurious, and pained me from a judgment which had been the pole-star of my dawning enthusiasm. Sore, on this subject, young as I was, I had the temerity to dissent, to wonder, and to vindicate; nor would concede at all on any point, except on that of the epithets, since, even in the finished copies, I have met with some that, neither adding force or colour, would have been better away; and I now observe their much more frequent re-

currence in these earlier editions. In them I also perceive occasional inflation and opacity of style, which had disgusted the purity of my father's classical taste. Thomson perceived them too, and his alterations justify the dear censor. I regret that he did not examine the expanded, the elucidated strains, well assured that he would have admired and honoured the self-correcting powers of the bard.

I shall state one or two instances of those epithets, which, even in the refined transcripts, yet want the chisel. Speaking of darkness, the poet says, in Autumn, page 190,

> " Order confounded lies, distinction lost,
> All beauty void, and gay variety
> One universal blot; such the fair power
> Of light to kindle and create the whole."

The epithet *fair* is a mere make-weight. The fine expression, *universal blot*, is taken from Milton, who, speaking of his own blindness, says he is " presented with an universal blank of nature's works."

To get rid of the encumbering epithet to *power*, I would rather have said,

> ——————" And gay variety
> One general blot on nature;—such the power
> Of light to kindle and create the whole."

Then, in Spring, page 15, I do not understand what is meant by birds "warbling the varied heart."

There is a striking inaccuracy in the very front and head of these charming poems—in the exordium of Spring. We are astonished that so nice an observer of nature should have permitted such an anachronism to remain, through all the editions he so carefully revised, viz. putting roses into the garland of an English Spring, when she first appears, and in their ripe luxuriance too!

> ——————"Veil'd in a shower
> Of shadowing roses on our plains descend!"

A proper invocation for Summer, not for Spring. Milton more accurately distinguishes:

> "Nor sight of vernal bloom, nor summer's rose."

Certainly the rose is summer's boast, nor ever ripens naturally in our climate till he has attained his strength.

There are some, but not very considerable alterations in the final edition of Spring from the first.

One fine passage, which I had wondered to see expunged, and which begins,—"These are

not idle philosophic dreams," I found judiciously removed into the poem Summer, only the first line changed, and supplied with two or three fine additional ones.

In the description of the eagle, on the 36th page of Spring, I miss, with regret, some lines which highly animated the passage in the earlier composition. The circumstance, whether true or fabulous, of the old eagle teaching the young ones to soar to the sun, forms a sublime picture in motion, which I am sorry to lose. Some expressions are finer in the altered passage of the last edition, and the local situation is more ascertained,—" but O! but O! the picture is forgot." Compare the two passages.

First Edition.

" High from the summit of a craggy cliff,
Hung o'er the green sea grudging at its base,
The royal eagle draws his young, resolv'd
To try them at the sun. Strong pounc'd and bright
As burnish'd day, they up the blue sky wind,
Leaving dull sight below, and with fix'd gaze
Drink in their native upon. The father king
Claps his glad pinions, and approves their birth."

Last Edition.

"High from the summit of a craggy cliff,
Hung o'er the deep, such as amazing frowns
On utmost Kilda's shore, whose lonely race
Resign the setting sun to Indian worlds,
The royal eagle draws his vigorous young,
Strong pounc'd and ardent with paternal fire,
Now fit to raise a kingdom of their own.
He drives them from his fort, the towering seat
Through ages of his empire; which in peace
Unstain'd he holds, while many a league to sea
He wings his course, and preys in distant isles."

I do not like the expression, "amazing frowns," and the mention of the Indian world is superfluous. I think the passages might be blended by the introduction of a few connecting half lines, so as to retain the excellencies of both—thus:

"High from the summit of a craggy cliff,
Hung o'er the ocean, such as sternly frowns
On utmost Kilda's shore, his vigorous young
The royal eagle draws, resolving straight
To try them at the sun. He marks their form,
Strong pounc'd and ardent with paternal fire,
Now fit to raise a kingdom of their own.
He drives them from his fort, the towering seat,
Through ages, of his empire. See they rise,
Wind up the clear blue sky, and with fix'd gaze

Drink in their native noon! The father king
Claps his glad pinions, and approves their birth.
Behold him then resume, in lonely state,
His promontory throne, whence many a league
He wings his course, and preys in distant isles."

The pruning hook and the chisel have each, in turn, been well employed, till the description of Hagley and its owners pours in new matter, and gives us a faithful picture of the scene. It supplies the place of a short and immaterial passage, which, in the last edition, is expunged.

For the glance of love, I think the epithet *enchanting* in the early edition, ill exchanged for *smooth* in the last. "Torrent-softness" is in both editions—but the epithet is uncongenial to the substantive; surely,

"When on his heart the flood of softness pours,"

would have been better.

Nor can I at all like the change in the last edition, where the symptoms of beginning and progressive love are enumerated. Its object, in the earlier poem, is represented amiable, here a treacherous prostitute,—and we find a vile prosaic line, unknown to the former:

"Prone into ruin fall his scorn'd affairs."

And the impassioned and devoted tenderness, so well described, suits not the total depravity of its object. The charming eulogium on virtuous love, and connubial bliss, remains in its primeval state, and closes that season.

Alterations crowd upon us in the poem Summer, and with very fine general effect, though there are expressions, and even successive lines expunged in the last edition, which I grieve to part with. For the ephemeral class of insects, the compound epithet "day-living race" is exchanged for the feebler and less appropriate, "daily-race," and this musical verse banished,

"The wild embroidery of the watery vale."

Perhaps it is not true that the lesser flies avoid encountering the bee;—else we should deplore the loss of lines which thus faithfully present him to the ear and eye:

——————"Careful still
To shun the mazes of the sounding bee,
As o'er the blooms he sweeps."

Thomson never lost his odd partiality for the inharmonious words *thick* and *things;* they occur perpetually in all the editions, and might generally have been exchanged to advantage.

The noon-day scenery is admirably expanded in the last edition. The hay-harvest and the sheep-shearing are all new matter, and given with the precision of exactest observation, and with the picturesque powers of genius.

The episodes are all dear to me, but I do not like the frequency of complimentary addresses to the actual persons of the author's day, and they are multiplied in the last edition. Good nature will, however, pardon them, as tributes of esteem or gratitude, and from their tendency to promote the sale of the work; but they ruefully encumber the poetry.

The alterations in the passage, from line *555*, have, I think, flattened "the race and flavour" which we perceive in the former reading. As to the description of the waterfall in the next passage, I hardly know which to prefer, the first or last fabrication.

Now appear the grand additions, produced by the scenery of the torrid climes. Johnson could not have cast the slightest glance upon them without perceiving their infinitely enhancing value—but it is likely he never saw them. If he had neither been prejudiced nor envious, his arrogant idleness outweighed the consideration of his talents in the scales of fitness, or unfitness for a critic, who was to decide upon the moral and intellectual

claims of preceding genius. He had not patience to examine and compare; yet, on all subjects, had the temerity to decide, without scruple, against the opinion of persons of great ability, who had examined and compared. I believe he seldom looked into the poetry he was criticizing, but pronounced judgment from the recollection of his juvenile impressions. If, in his later days, he opened the final edition of the Seasons, and met with a line or two which he liked better in the first copy, it would have been very like him to dash the book away, and, without farther examination, to conclude, that all the poet changed he had changed for the worse.

The thunder-storm is brought much forwarder in the poem, and, by little touches, improved; but the strikingly natural and fine picture of the shepherd, killed under a rock by the lightning, with his half-stunned dog at his feet, is struck out, and surely it is a great loss. The author probably thought it lessened the effect of the soon-succeeding story of Celadon and his Amelia—but the pictures, so different, though on the same subject, surely he judged ill to eraze the first. Then the moral reflections on the appalling scene, extending originally through twenty-four lines, are condensed into one; and who would not be sorry to lose such lines as these descriptive of the

man of malice, and of blood, beneath a pealing horizon:

> " He thinks the tempest weaves* around his head,
> Loudens the roar to him, and in his eye
> The bluest vengeance glares."

And the solitary atheist, attempting to pray, but unable, is also unhappily erazed.

I do not so much regret the banished passage which, in the first edition, succeeds to the story of Celadon and Amelia. It has obscurities of expression, and the picture has not Thomson's usual distinctness.

The horizon and landscape, shining out after the storm, is painted with double beauty and precision in the last edition; and what a gem is the added episode of Musidora bathing! The augmentation of the list of British heroes, sages, and patriots, must be welcome to every mind attached to its country, and admiring virtue.

The fine compliment to Scotland, and its inhabitants, with the simile of the Aurora Borealis for their talents, and the description of the ignis-fatuus, and the friendly meteor, and of the northern

* *Weaves*, a very bold but very fine word in that place—the loom of vengeance.—*S.*

lights, are all transferred from Summer, where they appeared in the first edition, to Autumn in the last, and are there seen with expanded power, and heightened grace; and in Summer we have the comet in their room.

Here end the material alterations in this splendid poetic Season. The final passages, in all the Seasons, remain as they were originally written—so also the opening ones, except the two first lines in the exordium of Summer, which are beautifully altered—and one word only in that to Winter, "red evening sky," is well changed to "grim evening sky."

And thus, loving the employment, have I been fond to evince how sedulously I have pursued the task of comparison, which your letters suggested. That which has been my pleasure, was Johnson's duty as the literary biographer of the great poet of nature. In a few posts, I purpose to send you the result of my scrutiny through the two remaining Seasons,—and remain, &c.

LETTER XIV.

THOS. PARK, ESQ.

Lichfield, May 19, 1798.

I RESUME, with alacrity, the agreeable theme of my last letter. And now, in the poem Autumn, instead of the strengthened fancy of the bard expanding his descriptions, and exploring a wider range of country, to add new scenery in his finished edition of Summer, we perceive here his matured judgment removing, with happy chisel, the incrustations of obscurity, and brilliantly polishing, by little touches, as it passes through the first 500 lines. In one of them we find the broad epithet *gaudy* given to Spring in both editions. It would have applied better to Summer—but, perhaps, he took it from Dryden; yet its sense in that author, where he applies it to Spring, being less direct,—metaphoric, not literal,—is more defensible; he says, "The spring of life, the bloom of gaudy years."

In the charming paraphrase of the Scripture story, Boaz and Ruth, for two half lines which had introduced city dames, who had no business

there, we are presented with the pretty simile of the myrtle in the desert;—that desert a little landscape among the Appenines, distinctly brought to the eye; and the speech of Palemon closes much more elegantly than in the early copy. The inundation has only one half line altered, and it is finely altered. Except in that one spot, it was not possible to improve it.

The field-sports were originally so admirably described, as not to want either addition or correction; and consequently have received few, and slight ones, in the final revision. To the inebriate evening, which succeeds, the picture of the toping doctor is added. All the pictures in that group are justly and strongly coloured; but the subject is disgusting. We are sorry to see Thomson exchanging the pencils of Poussin, Claude, and Salvator, for those of Teniers and Ostade.

In the primal composition of this Season, philosophy and poetic painting very interestingly combine, where the autumnal fogs commence;—the sources of the inland streams are suggested;—where the birds on their migration are so distinctly presented to the memory and imagination;—where the wild landscapes of Caledonia emerge, and that spirited eulogium on the virtues and talents of her sons is breathed. Along these parts, fine as they originally were, the alterations of the

consummate edition in this poem, become more considerable. We perceive the poet to have acquired more accurate ideas of natural history, and the power of imparting them in still more luminous diction. Sixty entire new lines are here added, in which all the mighty mountains of the globe pass in review before us, as the origin of lakes and rivers is conjectured. To make room for these, her royal highness, Princess Amelia, was dislodged in good hour, for she was a most intrusive person where she originally stood.

I wish the poet had also expunged the passage which begins, " O is there not some patriot," &c. How vexed we feel to see a curtain suddenly dropt on the scenery of the waning year, that we may attend to the patriotism of introducing the muslin manufacture into Scotland, and of looking better after the herrings. Succeeding to the prospect of the Scotish lakes, rivers, and mountains, and of the heroes who defended them, how unimportant seems the simpering portrait of the Duke of Argyle, with his " engaging turn" and " rich tongue,"—but there it was originally, and there has its author decreed it should unalienably remain.

Ah ! how glad we are to escape from the muslin-looms, the herrings, and the duke, into the woods

and wilds, since, with such a conductor, the fields are not less interesting for becoming russet, nor the groves for being silent; but we are not long suffered to pursue our walk uninterrupted. We must attend to an ideal personage, perhaps impressive enough to be recompensing; but, in the last edition, he no sooner withdraws, than, instead of being led back into our sylvan haunts, we are paraded into Stowe-Gardens, and obliged to hear about Pitt's oratory, and Lord Cobham's taste in horticulture.

At length nature and her scenery are given us back, amid the clustering fogs of the autumnal evening, her lunar, her stellar, and her boreal lights. Suddenly quenching them all, we have the dark night, the misleading and the friendly meteor taken from the poem Summer. Then rises the last autumal day, in all its mild and golden progress;—the destruction of the waxen citadel beautifully, pathetically exhibited;—an eulogium on domestic life in the country, with vivid and interesting pictures of its delights, and with an apostrophe to nature; and thus closes this third Season. From the time we escape from Stowe-Gardens to the conclusion, the early composition remains nearly untouched.

There cannot, I think, be a doubt that these lines in the Autumn suggested one of the finest

passages in Cowper's Task. Speaking of the virtuous man in retirement, Thomson says,—

" While he, from all the stormy passions free,
That restless men infest, hears and but hears,
At distance safe, the human tempest roar,
Wrapt close in conscious peace. The fall of kings,
The rage of nations, and the crush of states
Move not the man who, from the world escaped,
In still retreats and flowery solitudes,
On nature's voice attends."

TASK.

" Tis pleasant, through the loop-holes of retreat,
To peep at such a world—to see the stir
Of the great Babel, and not feel the crowd,
To hear the roar she sends through all her gates
At a safe distance, where the dying sound
Falls, a faint murmur*, on th' uninjur'd ear.
Thus sitting, and surveying thus at ease,
The globe and its concerns, I seem advanced
To some secure and more than mortal height,
Which liberates and exempts me from them all.
It turns submitted to my view!—turns round
With all its generations!—I perceive
The tumult and am still. The sound of war
Has lost its terrors ere it reaches me,

* Hears and but hears.—*S.*

Grieves, but alarms me not. I mourn the pride
And avarice that make man a wolf to man;
Hear the faint echo of those brazen throats,
By which he speaks the language of his heart,
And sigh, but never tremble at the sound."

Mr Cowper has risen upon his original in this passage. So will it always invariably be, when true poetic genius takes hints from kindred talents which have preceded its range through the fields of fancy. The ramifications from the leading idea, branch out so happily under Cowper's hand, as to give the passage added strength as well as beauty.

And now comes the sublime Winter, richest in alteration, and addition, of all its brethren of the year. The unchanged exordium is worthy its majestic theme; and there are prodigious fine verses in the address to Wilmington, between the second and twelfth lines of that address. They could not be improved from their first formation. In the last edition, the graces, and even the muses are banished this panegyric, and the sterner excellence of patriotism supplies their place judiciously, as according better with the ensuing subject. In the next passage of solemn description, the alterations are only verbal and few, but they are happy.

I enter my warm protest against the alteration in

the commencement of the next. We find Winter personified and in action, in the early edition, thus sublimely:

> " Now comes the father of the tempest forth
> Striding the gloomy blast. First rains obscure,
> Drive through the mingling skies with vapour foul."

In the last edition thus:

> " Then comes the father of the tempest forth,
> Wrapt in black glooms. First joyless rains obscure
> Drive through the mingling sky, with vapour foul."

This flattening change obliged the poet to eke out the measure with the superfluous epithet *joyless*. Line 99, early edition, says the river comes roaring down " from the chapt mountain and the mossy wild." The last edition changes *chapt* mountain to *rude* mountain,—not, I think, happily, since, however common the first word in the mouth of the vulgar, it presents to the perception instantly the dry, brown, and cracked state of bare hills in winter, while the epithet *rude* has no sense which partakes of the influence of the season.

I do not like the spinning out into four lines, in the last edition, this fine line and half, which, in the former, opens the presages of the winter storm:

" Late, in the lowering sky red fiery streaks
Begin to flush around."

The change produces an inharmonious repetition of the word *when.* Line 125 improves upon the old reading, by substituting for the moon, " blunted horns," instead of *sullied orb.* It brings her more to the eye, when she is dimmed by the halo; —and the passage is, on the whole, extremely enriched by the multiplication of the symptoms that precede the tempest; but one line is altered for the worse, thus:

" Through the loud night that bids the waves arise."
Early Ed.

" Through the black night that sits immense around."
Last Ed.

Surely the expression *sits immense,* is not good; and surely the epithet *loud* for such a night, could not be exchanged to advantage for any word in the language. Again, the early edition says of the crew of the ship in the tempest, shooting down between the waves:

" The full-blown Baltic thundering o'er their heads."

The last edition says, more tamely,

" The wintry Baltic thundering o'er their heads."

When, in pursuing the tempest to its effects on land, Thomson says, the trees "stoop to the bottom of the rocks they shade," it is a plagiarism from Shakespeare, who says of a noble youth incensed:

> "Rough as the wind, which takes the mountain pine,
> And stoops him to the vale."

Slight and few, but skilful, are the alterations in that fine episode of the cottager perishing in the snow. The circumstances are strongly conceived, and simply pathetic. The poet places us in the drear indistinguishable waste. We shudder, we commiserate, and the mournful sympathy remains long upon the heart. The passage which impressively moralizes the sad scene, received no momentous alteration in the author's final revision. That which mentions the jail committee, is considerably changed. The applause is here confined to the design, and the panegyric, which, in the early edition, hails it as accomplished, is converted into an exhortation not to suffer the spirit of scrutiny and justice to slacken in their exertions. This change proves that the poet perceived he had relied too fondly, and exulted too soon.

Now advance the important transpositions in the local scenery, and those expansive additions

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which so highly exalt the final above the early editions of this noble poem. On first comparing them, I was startled to see vanished from the place they originally occupied, the Court of Winter—the sublimely pictured bear—the Russian Laplander, his sledge and his rein-deer; but, on proceeding, I found they had been judiciously removed, and reserved to produce a climax in the circumstances of hybernal dreariness. Those circumstances in the consummate publication, commense with the wintry Alps, Appenines, and Pyrennees, and their wolves; and in that part there is no change from the early edition, except that the involving precipitation of the thundering avalanches is added.

On the temporary dismissal of the scenic muse for the muse of history, we find the list of heroes, sages, and bards, of elder and later time, extremely swelled in this last edition—with perhaps too much display of learning respecting the ancients. We hail, with grateful pleasure, the tribute to the poets of his own day, and his affectionate eulogy to his amiable departed friend, Hammond.

The Attic evening, and its themes, has received little change;—nor yet the festal sports of the village Christmas-night—nor the more elegant, nor the ruinous pleasures of the capital;—but here is Lord Chesterfield introduced, and the

apostrophe to him is not amongst the valuable acquisitions of this the latest revised copy.

In one of the finest parts of the whole collected Seasons, the passage in this, which begins, "What art thou frost," there are only four words changed, and one line omitted. Those few verbal changes are, however, all to good effect.

The description of skating is much improved, from taking in the perfection of that art in Batavia and Russia.

From the line which begins, "But what is this?—our infant winter," &c. we meet with a grand accession of hybernal scenery, and perceive also the northern images, which we had missed from the elder copy, restored and interwoven here with more distinctness, and more local propriety.

In the Lapland scenery of the earlier edition, we find great local inaccuracy in one line, the harmony of which is exquisite; it is the last of the following three:

> "On sleds reclined, the furry Russian sits,
> And, by his rein-deer drawn, behind him throws,
> A shining kingdom in a winter's day."

The poet forgot the six months length of a Lapland winter's night; that he was describing an ice

landscape, on which the day never rises; and that *kingdom* was a word very improperly applied to those regions.

In the last edition we find those three lines banished, and, in their room a more distinct and far more beautiful ice-landscape shewn to us beneath its proper horizon, lighted by moons, stars, and meteors, infinitely more luminous and vivid than they are ever seen in milder climates; but I regret to meet three prosaic lines, adhering to this fine description; I do not like, after being whirled by rein-deers over such a marbled expanse of hills, dales, and mountains, to be conveyed to Finland fairs.

Having taken much affront at the banishment of my old acquaintance of the early edition, the sublime and shapeless bear, I was right glad to meet him again in this part of the consummate poem, stalking along with his icicles dangling about him,

> " Slow paced and sourer."

There was no mending *him*;—but here we have a Lapland spring, of which the elder edition makes no mention;—and, having surveyed it, we pass over the Lake of Tornêa, and over Hecla, " burning amidst the waste of snows,"—all added scenery; and, in remotest Greenland, we find the

Court of Winter, which had been less judiciously placed in the former copy.[o] Thence, winding eastward to the coast of Tartary, we are presented with an improved picture of the frozen ocean, and a totally new description of the last habitable climate, and its sluggish inhabitants, on the dreary shores of the Obey—and with a spirited eulogium on the renowned Peter, civilizing his Russian empire.

And here end the material contributions, which the strengthened powers of the bard gave to this his sublimest poem.

The grand thaw appears nearly the same as in the earlier edition; it was there too perfect to want revision;—and the noble conclusion remains the boast of his younger muse, and is perhaps the finest passage in the four priceless poems.—Adieu!

LETTER XV.

Right Hon. Lady Eleanor Butler.

Lichfield, June 4, 1798.

Since I had the honour and happiness to hear from your Ladyship and Miss Ponsonby, I fear your mutual peace has again been cruelly annoyed by the struggles of rebellion in your native country, rallying her dark forces. Happily, however, they meet nothing but defeat. The opinion seems very general, that ere long they will be finally subdued. May it prove so!—for if Ireland should fall into the power of France, a similar fate for this country cannot be distant. May the attempt to overthrow constitutional government in Ireland be such as to blast the hopes, and wither the exertions of those in our own nation, who suffer their just indignation against the cabinet-council of London to pass the bounds of reason and humanity, who are endeavouring to establish the tyranny of democratic sway in these dominions, though they perceive the lawless oppression it has produced in France, where extent of empire presents

no compensation for the slavery under which her people groan.

I hope to Heaven, that the force from England, necessary to quell Irish insurrection, will not exhaust our means of adequate protection, should the desperate French effect their invading purpose. If they can escape our fleets, they doubtless mean to make a descent on both countries at the same, or nearly the same, period. Obtaining footing in Ireland, the mischief to us of the disaffection there would indeed be terrible. I have always foreseen the consequence of provoking the majority of that nation, by the recal of Lord Fitzwilliam, and by the rejection of his conciliatory plan. That was the period, never perhaps again to recur, in which, granting to the Catholics equal privileges with the Protestants, would have softened the jealous and embittered spirit of a long-oppressed, a brave, but, when roused into resistance, a fierce, a rash, a cruel people;—would have united them, heart and hand with England, against the common foe, the tyrant of Europe.

Our private friends are ever first and oftenest in our thoughts, beneath the lour of national calamity. I peruse and hear every syllable of Irish news with Lady Eleanor and Miss Ponsonby's image before my eyes, and every hope and fear on the subject passes through the medium of my

sympathy with their feelings; especially since I learnt that their fortunes, as well as anxieties, from connection, are at stake in the conflict. My solicitude then became poignant indeed, in despite of every human probability, that, however the storm of rebellion may yet again gather and re-gather, ere its final dispersion, yet, if the French can be kept from those coasts, it will never be able to sink your hopes and your independence in the "dire vortex of French dominion."

What a mischievous madman has Lord E. Fitzgerald proved! You have deplored the fate of his gentle, his accomplished Adelaide—hard, indeed, if she loves the rash one, who hath trod the dark paths of her father's destruction. He will meet from this government, which he has deserted, an equal and an earlier fate. It will anticipate the destiny which he would doubtless have met from the French, had they, by his means, and those of his kindred spirits, drawn Ireland within the grasp of their power.

> "Thus deadly Atropus, with fatal shears,
> Slits the thin promise of th' expected years,
> While, 'mid the dungeon's gloom, and battle's din,
> Ambition's victims perish as they spin."

I am excessively gratified, that you think dear Honora lovely; that you honour her with a situa-

tion so distinguished. Every line in that engraving* bears her stamp and image, except those which, in a luckless moment, combined to attach the foot of a plough-boy to a form in every other point so beautiful. All the obligation of her establishment in the Lyceum of Langollen Vale is on my side. How could dear Miss Ponsonby speak of it as on yours and her own! I would cheerfully have given treble the cost of this engraving, for the consciousness that the similitude of the fair idol of my affections is thus enshrined.

Honora Sneyd, after she became Mrs Edgeworth, sat to Smart, at that time a celebrated miniature-painter. He totally missed the likeness, which Major André had, from his then inexperience in the art, so faintly, and with so little justice to her beauty, caught. Romney accidentally, and without having ever beheld her, produced it completely. Yes, he drew, to represent the Serena of the Triumphs of Temper, his own abstract idea of perfect loveliness, and the form and the face of Honora Sneyd rose beneath his pencil.

Few circumstances have proved so fortunate for the indulgence of my heart as this accidental

* Romney's picture of Serena reading by candle-light.—*S.*

resemblance. A fortnight since, according to my annual custom, I removed it from my sitting-room below stairs, of western aspect, to my little embowered book-room, into whose northern window the sun never looks in his ardour, though it catches partially, in summer, the golden glances of his evening beams. Thus is this beauteous resemblance my constant companion, and contributes to endear, as the bright reality endeared, in times long past, this pleasant mansion to my affections;—and thus, whenever I lift my eyes from my pen, my book, or the faces of my companions, they anchor on that countenance, which was the sun of my youthful horizon. Another striking likeness of my lost Honora, in a paper shade, taken when she was seventeen, stands opposite my bed, and has stood there from the time she left this house, in her nineteenth year. Thus are those dear lineaments ever present to my sight, when I am beneath this roof, alike in the hours of energy and of repose, retouching the traits of memory, over which indistinctness is apt to steal, in consequence of perpetual and too intense recurrence. But for such aptness, pictures of those we love would be of little value.

Those oppressive rheumatic pains in my loins, my back, and knees, which are gradually stealing

away all the strength of my frame, oblige me to think of trying Buxton again,—and the state exactions prevent my income from allowing me to take two journies this year. The cordial assurance you give me of your mutual wishes to see me in your Eden, ere the bright months pass away, stimulates my, alas! fruitless wishes to find myself in that dear adorned retirement. I rejoice that your beloved Miss Bowdler will soon visit it daily. Her society will often steal your thoughts from the lurid clouds that darken your native land. Happy for me if those imperious circumstances, which so often deride our free agency, would permit my joining the interesting party.

It gives me pleasure that you meditate for Mr Whalley, should he revisit your neighbourhood, a recompence for having coldly repressed the aspiration of his hope to have been received at Langollen. He has talents and virtues that merit this recompence—and it will increase your wish of extending it, to know that his peace is blighted by the base ingratitude and infamous unchastity of the child of his cares, whom nature had endowed and adorned with lavish profusion, both as to beauty and genius, and whose talents his exertions had cultivated to the most dazzling extent. Often does he exclaim with Sciolto,

" O! when I think what pleasure I took in thee,
What joy thou gav'st me in thy prattling infancy,
Thy sprightly wit and early blooming beauty!—
I thought the day too short to gaze upon thee,
Why didst thou turn to folly, then, and curse me?"

This cruel disappointment has changed him much —has lamentably chilled the glow of his warm and generous mind, respecting the effusions of genius and the attainment of art. He ceases also to delight in corresponding with his distant friends. It is long since I heard from him.

I remain, dearest Madam, your ever affectionate and devoted, &c.

LETTER XVI.

EDMUND WIGLEY, ESQ.

Lichfield, June 11, 1798.

AH, Sir! I condole with you on the late dispatches from Ireland. Insurrection there grows more dark, bloody, and formidable. Desperate and cruel as that people shew themselves, I shall always think the mischiefs of their roused and

long-embittered spirit, have been drawn upon us, by ministerial obstinacy, and unwise measures, together with almost all our other national dangers. If Ireland cannot be effectually subdued, I much fear her example will raise English discontent to rebellion-pitch. The distresses occasioned by the decay of trade, and by the forcible demand for soldiers, have, I am told, excited much hatred towards government amongst the lower orders of people, even in this the loyalest county in England. It is actual hardship and misery; it is coercion upon the will, both as to life and property, and not theories, as Mr Burke idly maintains, which are the real causes by which mighty empires are overthrown. His fatal eloquence awakened the Quixotism which has combated his phantom at the expence of incurring real dangers.

Have you seen an exquisite satire on the plan and on the absurdities of Darwin's supremely ingenious, but very affected poem, The Economy of Vegetation, and Loves of the Plants. This sly mockery from rival genius, is entitled The Loves of the Triangles, and Allegoric Garden. It has appeared in the form of extracts in the Anti-Jacobin for last April, 16th, 23d, and for May the 7th.

In wit and humour, in the happiness of having exactly caught Dr Darwin's very peculiar style of versification, the author proves himself worthy to reprehend, by exquisite caricature, the faults of a fine writer;—his elaborate and too profuse ornaments;—the too lavish frequency of those hyperboles which make rivers laugh, bridges scowl, and shores applaud, &c.—his many affectations;—his eulogiums on the demon of Europe, modern liberty;—the dissimilarity to their subject of those successive trains of passages, which begin with, "So," and "Thus," and which press into the service of illustration a countless number of circumstances from history, fable, romance, and tradition:—too charmingly told, it is true, to permit our wishing them away, while we feel that they are open to ridicule. So, also, it must be confessed, is the plan, the Linnean and sexual system of plants and flowers, whose personification, together with that of the elemental properties, is admirably burlesqued in the Loves of the Triangles; where curves, and cubes, lines, circles, fluxions, and tangents, are transformed into nymphs and swains, and are in love with each other. Trochais, the nymph of the wheel, in love with Smoke-Jack. The nymphs Parabola, Hyperbola, and Ellipsis in love with the Cone, &c. &c. Nor

less ably satirized is the hypothetical philosophy of the notes to Darwin's poem.

Those only who have read and understood that composition, will understand and feel this able-spirited and highly-amusing satire upon its faults. Both will be alike caviare to the multitude.

The author, whoever he is, proves himself able to break a poetic-lance with the bard of Derby. It is diamond cut diamond here. After all, the true judges and unenvying admirers of fine poetry, have only to open the Economy of Vegetation, and Loves of the Plants, to forgive their author all his affectations in the verse, all his extravagant theories in the notes—everything, in short, but his irreligion, and encomiums on the terrible and tyrannic democracy of France, in consideration of those exhaustless and genuine beauties and sublimities, which are found in such enchanting preponderance along his fanciful composition. All such readers, however they may be amused with the rare powers of this able and learned satirist, will feel that the plan of Dr Darwin's poem, though not invulnerable to the shafts of burlesque, was yet new and fortunate in the hands of genius so bold, imaginative, and picturesque, that the poetic enchantment of its pages is resistless.

LETTER XVII.

MR SAVILLE.

Lichfield, June 15, 1798.

IT is unlucky, but I hope to Heaven it will not be more than unlucky, for your short residence in London, that here is a June whose cloudless ardours have not been paralleled during very many past years. The summer-solstice is generally ushered in by winds and showers; but, during the three past weeks, the rivers have shrunk in their banks, the channels of the brooks are dry; the lawns are brown and slippery; the earth wrinkles as in frost; birds sit silent in the centres of the hedge-rows; the cows stand with drooping neck in the reedy brooks; the streets are still vacant and dusty, and silence is over the hills at noon.

I have passed the glowing hours from breakfast till dinner on the terrace, reading Urry's Life of Chaucer, published 1721, in the eleventh year of Dr Johnson's existence. It surprised me to see three of the sentences turned in John-

son's peculiar manner, and following each other —thus:

"The court*, at that time, consisted of all that was great and splendid. Every thing that could be desired contributed to make it glorious; —a long and happy reign, successful in victories abroad, filled it with heroes, and a just administration at home supplied it with men of learning. These are so inseparably linked together, that where there are men of valour, there can be no slavery and oppression; and where there are slavery and oppression, there can be no men of learning."

These sentences have a strength of expression, and roundness of construction unlike the loose and involved style of our prose-writers, so early in this century, even of that which was generally esteemed the best, as Addison's. I have been accustomed to consider the rounder and more nervous period to have been introduced by Dr Johnson: but these sentences are strikingly in his style, and not only in their construction, but in that imposing air of decision, which impresses ordinary minds with implicit faith in the veracity of dogmas of such point and antithesis, while rational investigation demonstrates their fallacy. Men of learning, and men of valour, are often the at-

* The court of Edward III.

tendants of very despotic thrones: as that of Augustus Cæsar evinced in former ages, and that of Louis the XIV. in later times. Thus vanishes the veracity of that assertion;—and thus, before the scrutiny of discerning thought, melts into inanity the first part of one of Johnson's sentences, the nature and style of which is extremely similar. "Where there is emulation there must be envy, and where there is envy, there can be no virtue." It will readily be granted, that where there is envy there can be no true virtue; but to blend and confound a generous with a base passion, by asserting, that where there is emulation there must be envy, ill became the moral philosopher.

It has always been confessed, as it has always been felt, that emulation is the prime source of excellence in every art, in every science, and in every virtue. It is as distinct from envy as true and tender affection is distinct from merely libidinous desire. Emulation loves—envy hates its object; emulation hopes—envy despairs; emulation is ingenuous—envy is deceitful; emulation is energetic—envy is indolent; emulation delights to contemplate its model, and to point out to others its every excellence—envy turns from its object, or examines it only to depreciate; emulation is the health of genius—envy its morbid disease. It was his disease who has pro-

nounced that no virtue can exist in the mind it envenoms.

That emulation may degenerate into envy, is certain, as an overflow of health may produce fatal distemper; but then it can only thus degenerate where the temper is morose. Passions, so different in their nature, and in their effects, can have no natural, much less inevitable tendency to incorporate.

While Chaucer's historian thus, in three sentences, resembles Johnson's style and manner, he writes of his author with a very different spirit from that which dipt in aquafortis the biographic pen which chronicled our poets. Mr Urry very beautifully descants on the genius and writings of the father of English verse; and with an efflorescence of diction, as little common to the prose of that period, as was the nervous compression as to style, in the preceding extract from the Life of Chaucer—thus:

"Chaucer's life was temperate and regular. He went to rest with the sun in summer, and, rising before it, enjoyed the pleasures of the best part of the day, his morning walk and fresh contemplations. Hence he had the advantage of describing the morning in that lively manner which we so often find exemplified in his works. The springing sun glows warm in his lines, and the

fragrant air breathes cool in his descriptions. We smell the sweets of the blooming haws, and hear the music of the feathered choir, whenever we take a forest-walk with him. The hour of the day is not easier to be discovered from the reflection of the sun in Titian's paintings, than in Chaucer's morning-landscapes."

It is amiable in the biographer of excellent persons to place every merit in the fullest light; and generous minds are more disposed to pardon a little over-weening partiality, than the slightest treachery of unjust depreciation; while, to ungenerous minds, more welcome is that caustic-spleen which gratifies their wish of levelling the exalted. Of Mr Urry's far more virtuous partiality, I met a striking instance in the following passage.

"In most of Chaucer's poems, where he designs an imaginary scene, he certainly copies it from a real landscape. In his Cuckow and Nightingale, the morning-walk may be traced at this day, from his house, through part of the park, into the vale under Blenheim Castle, as certainly as we may be assured that maples, instead of phylereas, were the ornaments round the bower."

Always charmed by local appropriation in poetic landscape, I eagerly turned to the passage referred to in Chaucer's Cuckow and Nightingale, and found it thus:

" And right anon, as I the day espied,
No longer would I in my bed abide,
But into a wood that was me fast by,
I went forth alone myself boldily,
And held my way down by a brooke's side,

Till I came to a land of white and green,
So fair an one had I never in been ;
The ground was green powder'd with daisy,
The flowris and the groves alikie,
All green and white was nothing ellis seen.

There sat I down among the fair flowris,
And saw the birds tripping out of their bowris ;
There as they roosted them had all night,
They were so joyful of the dayis light,
They began of May for to do honoris."

Thus closes a description which has, in truth, none of that local appropriation attributed to it by Mr Urry. It is alike suited to every scene through which runs a brook. The daisies do nothing for the appropriation, since every English turf at least has its daisies. The land, therefore, of white and green can present no peculiar spot. We know not, from such expressions, whether the place described be a hill, a valley, a field, a forest, or a glen. This indistinctness, this total want of local discrimination, renders poetic landscape very defective. Since the time of Chaucer, its duties have been better understood. Milton's and Thom-

son's landscapes are so distinct, that the painter might draw from them as readily as from Nature herself; while, before the poetic imagination, they rise discriminate and complete in all the tints of their season. Nor less accurate is the scenic-painting of our best modern poets. The scene they delineate lives in their verse. I confess, however, there is one very picturesque line in my quotation from the old bard:

> "And saw the birds tripping out of their bowris."

It is an image that strongly, as well as beautifully, marks the hour of summer's dawn.

Ah! what an hour of pleasantness and prime is *that* in this sultry period!—but, weary and oppressed with the heats of the preceding day, the leaden mace of sleep lies too heavy on our lids to permit us to look on the half-opened eyes of the morning, or to view the sun

> "While yet his dewy radii slope to earth,
> And all the kindling landscapes of the east
> Rise gemm'd to meet his beams."

LETTER XVIII.

Miss Ponsonby.

Lichfield, June 19, 1798.

I hoped to have acknowledged my loved Miss Ponsonby's last, and very kind letter, in an hour when the reply might have commenced with those glad gratulations that my heart longs to utter—but the felicity is at present denied me. The rest of many of my nights has been disturbed by the dread those sanguinary tidings inspired, which arrived from Ireland since I wrote to Lady Eleanor, and many a heartache has sickened the awaking hour.

To attain lettered ease and tranquillity of spirit, you fled together, in early youth, from the otherwise inextricable mazes of connection. The resolution and constancy with which the plan has been pursued through nineteen years, rendered it, as I thought, invulnerable to any long-enduring care, sorrow, or solicitude, while life and health were mutually lent you. Often have I said to myself, picturing the little Eden,

> " If e'er content deign'd visit mortal clime,
> That is her place of dearest residence."

But, alas! civil war is an omnipresent fiend, whose baleful influence penetrates every seclusion, the inhabitants of which have dependence on, or connection with the country it ravages. Yet be comforted, my dear and honoured friends, and repose upon the hope that Lord Cornwallis and his armies will crush this horrid, this murderous rebellion!—that when valour, generalship, and numbers have unstrung its sinews, he will be commissioned to extend that concession to the just claims of the people, which may do away all invidious distinction between catholic and protestant, dissenter and churchman; the tyrannic exertion of which has been the cause of all the assassinations, the woes, and dangers to both islands, that have been the bitter fruits of bad policy and injustice on one hand, and of wicked and unbridled revenge on the other.

Amiable Mrs St George—Where is she?—Not in Ireland, I hope.

Since I closed the last sentence, I have read to-day's paper. Thank God it enables me to congratulate on the better aspect of the deplored contest. Yes, the smiles of hope are

at this instant relumining the countenance of my friends. O may their soft cheering light be permanent!

I remain, &c.

LETTER XIX.

Rev. T. S. Whalley.

Lichfield, July 3, 1798.

You complained, when you wrote to me, of recent indisposition. The ardours of last month must have been trying to the degree of weakness which accompanies convalescence; but the pure gales of your mountain would temper the flames of its days, and heavy sultriness of its nights, and, I trust, you have ere this time regained your strength. I congratulate you upon the state of an health, which, well I know, is dearer to you than your own. Very long may that, and all your other comforts, be continued, and mitigate, more and more yet every day, one bosom-woe, for which I often sigh!—but I will not dwell on the cruel theme.

Would to Heaven that you could put in mental force Sciolto's words, when he says:

> " But, O! of that, as of a gem long lost,
> Think we no more!"

With what kind cordiality do you press me to reside in your little Eden this summer! Alas! my rheumatic maladies impel me on another and far less pleasant course. I must go to Buxton, and must not, in prudence, take two long journies, of destination so wide of each other. Mr Saville is at his native Ely, after a fortnight's stay in London. He commissions me with his grateful thanks for including him in an invitation, which it would be most delightful to us both to accept; but he must seek the coast, if business at home will allow him to make another excursion ere winter returns.

I met at dinner, at Catton, last week, your friend the married Louisa G——, who has changed her state, without having changed her name. I never saw her look so healthy, or so handsome. She is grown *embonpoint*, and has animated her once statue-like husband with the vital light of love and happiness. All who know her, think she will make an excellent wife, using

wisely an uncontested dominion, and " doing her spiriting gently."

I mentioned to you, in my last, your acquaintance Miss N.'s marriage, that she is now Mrs F., the wife of a Kentish gentleman. They have been here six weeks with their eldest daughter, just seventeen: a brunette with fine eyes, good height and shape, and handsome when flushed into bloom by exercise, but with complexion and hair too dark to spare that glow without losing her claim to beauty. Mr F., though perhaps some years younger than his lady, is yet enough advanced in life to save her choice from indiscretion on that point, and time has yet indulgently withheld his iron-traces from her form and face. At no time of her life was she so personally agreeable. She has good sense, and, when she casts aside the too often worn veil of haughty reserve, is far from being uninteresting—therefore is there no reason to doubt, that she was loved for herself, rather than for her fortune, by a very agreeable man, of considerable and various information, and universally allowed merit. If his daughters inherit their father's principles and temper, the means of happiness are amply in her power; if she can but resolve not to aim at a single restraint, which is not clearly necessary to their future welfare. Strict mothers, if essential-

ly good, may possibly be loved by their own children, but must be hated by those of another woman.

This day Mrs F. takes everlasting leave of this her native city as an home. No inhabitant in her class has been so stationary. Surely, surely she must feel some portion of that regret, the appearance of which she did not wear, on such a wide, such an interminable separation!

As to me!—how little do we know ourselves! I was always conscious that she did not love me, though, while her father lived, his partiality for me threw us often together, through a long course of years; but we were not kindred spirits; yet was she, when in good humour, more agreeable to me than I was to her. Of late years, however, the repeated proofs she has given of utter want of regard, by a course of trivial but studied slights, wholly unprovoked, made me fancy she had extinguished the affection in my heart, that grew on frequent association, in sportive infancy and hoping youth; and in our later period of calm descent from the meridian of life, from mutual consciousness of those eternally vanished beings, which, separately, and sometimes jointly, interested us;—but, on taking leave of her yesterday, I found that pained impressions of unprovoked unkindness had not dissolved the force of

those ties. I was affected, even to anguish, at bidding her an adieu, so likely to be eternal.

You are more sanguine than ever, I find, on the subject of that contest which you think we have maintained for the preservation of Europe, and which, I think, we have maintained for our own destruction, and the aggrandizement of that tyrannic nation, the annihilation of whose very existence, on the scale of continental empire, we madly planned.

You have the eloquence and the infatuation of Burke on this theme,—and I am one of the twin-spirits of Cassandra, doomed, alas! to prophesy truly, without obtaining any credit for our future, by the full accomplishment of our past predictions.

It is still my unshaken creed, that if princes, and those who counsel them, had discernment enough to be more afraid of the pressure of actual distress amongst the people, than of systems and modes of faith, which they may fancy inimical to subordinate government, we should hear of few empires being subverted. What made the reign of Elizabeth so happy for her subjects, so glorious to herself, but her unswerving resolve never to sacrifice the blood of her people, and hazard destroying their means of comfort by waste

of the public treasure, to obtain the false glory of war, when its struggles, its consequent and dreadful evils, could either be avoided or terminated. Her people felt this truly maternal care; and that consciousness made the chains of her despotism light. O! justly does your favourite poet exclaim, in his Task:

> "War is a game which, were their subjects wise,
> Kings could not play at."

I have the unbiassed testimony of your letters from the Continent, in 1783, when the impression, which produced that sympathy, was local, immediate, and warm, for the miseries of Savoy, when you saw monarchical tyranny wrenching from the hard hands of laborious savages the fruits of their toil. The same oppressive system prevailed in Germany.

Was it to be expected, that people thus enslaved, thus miserable, would resist effectually the assaults of a foreign power, extending the lures of emancipation and comfort? What matters it to the wretched who those are that impose their wretchedness? If national prejudice and national pride did not utterly perplex and mislead the judgment of numbers, who have high talent and extensive information, conscious that misery rushes

on change, they would feel and own, that peace and its comforts form the best security of empires.

I know, alas! that peace is not now within the reach of England; that she has unfortunately rejected the several opportunities of restoring it during the course of this dire warfare; that she has long forgotten the assertion of Scripture, "Blessed are the peace-makers;" and has employed herself in exciting and bribing other nations to maintain the war, after it became hopeless to the allied powers, till, I fear, the miseries, of which she was reckless, will be retaliated upon herself.

The emperor would have obtained much better terms of pacification than he can now obtain, if he had renounced the unavailing contest when Prussia renounced it. England, seeking reconcilement then, would have obtained glorious terms. Against their infringement by the daring treachery of the French, we had bulwarks, unpossessed by any continental monarch, in our watery walls, and their yet invincible guards, together with the known superiority of attachment in our people to their government, founded on the greater degree of freedom and comfort which they enjoy in comparison with the slaves of despotism in Austria, Prussia, Spain, and in the fell republic.

If it was not safe for us to have made peace

when France wished, and England ought to have wished it, it must be at least as unsafe now and hereafter;—that is demonstrable;—and of the ceaseless continuance of this exterminating contest, ruin and revolution are the certain consequences to this country. It is romantic in the extreme, to hope that France will relinquish the opportunity given her by our foolish obstinacy, of wasting us into helpless weakness by the insupportable expence of this war, and its sure destruction to our commerce; especially since she is obliged to keep up standing armies to maintain her continental conquests, which render it little more expence to her to be at war than at peace with England. At this juncture, Louis the XVIII., on the throne of his fathers, durst not grant to baffled England advantageous terms of peace, even had he the gratitude to wish it; so true is it that nothing can rationally be hoped for the interest of this country from any change of government in France; nor yet, if, stung by the oppressions of the tyrannic nation, Spain, Austria, and Prussia should again unite to oppose her. If, in the zenith of their strength, wealth, and prosperity, and supported by England, they failed in every attempt against France, even when she was unallied, and in anarchy, what now can they hope to effect to check a power so vast and so establish-

ed? America, distant, and without ships of war, cannot annoy France, and must be defended against her by us at a vast expence. Then, as to the new boasts of Russia, I wonder you are not weary of being duped by them. That emperor, like his politically wise, though wicked predecessor, shews us fleets in the magic-lantern of hope, but none appear in our seas. Meanwhile our conquests in the West-Indies are gradually wrested from us, and probably Bonaparte is gone to the East, and, if he has slipt our fleet, we have no armies there to oppose his. And, lo! a new voracious grave is opened for our best blood and exhausted treasure in Ireland—a grave which timely conciliation, as extended by Lord Fitzwilliam, would, in all human probability, have kept closed. The hour is now past in which conciliation could avail us there. At least it must not be tried till all the force of the rebellion is broken. The dogs of civil war are slipt on that unhappy and long-oppressed country, and must range on through misery and blood. Resistance there has assumed a too infernal form to excite any thing but detestation in candid minds; and of its triumph, civil war, or French dominion here, must be the consequence.

The dispersion of the public apprehensions excited by the gasconade of the French and their invasion-plans, has excited new intoxication. Our

nation has almost risen in mass! Insurrection is likely, for the present, to be crushed in Ireland, and we exult and triumph, and shut our eyes to the long train of national evils inseparable from the continuance of a war we have no power to terminate on terms of tolerable advantage;—a war whose motives vanished, or changed their ground beneath our obstinate persistence;—and how that persistence is, as you assert, to save Europe, if it should not destroy us, I am utterly at a loss to guess, disengaged as we are from all our allies, and not surely mad enough to begin again the desperate game of subsidy, without which, our ministers asserted that it was out of the power of the allies, four years ago, to oppose France to purpose. How, then, should they now oppose her, strengthened as she is, and they "exhausted, oppressed, and fallen." Armed and fortified against all outward assault, she can only fall by internal dissension, and that will never take place while foreign powers continue to menace her.

Without any senatorial connection, without a single selfish view to bias my understanding, these are my deep-felt convictions—they have resulted from a strictly dispassionate attention to the arguments for and against the prosecution of this war, from the period of its commencement, collected from a ministerial paper, the Evening

Mail—the only one I read, for I do not wish to see the errors of ministry on the exaggerating page of their avowed and indiscriminate foes. Heaven knows they are sufficiently gigantic on the tablets of their friends. I have read, with equal eye, the books of Burke, and of Boothby, and Macintosh, of Erskine, and of Gifford. Attached to the constitution of this country, and dreading revolution, I am alike disposed to censure the opposition as the ministry, when any thing falls from their lips or pens, which tends to produce tumult and revolt. Hence I have been reproached with aristocracy by the violent of the opposing party, and with democracy by the court *idolaters*;—but you, however we may differ, will understand me better, believing me at once attached to the triune dominion of England, and one of the sincerest of your friends.

LETTER XX.

REV. H. F. CARY.

Lichfield, July 5, 1798.

YOU inquire, my friend, if the satiric powers in the Loves of the Triangles have not lowered my admiration of Dr Darwin's poetry—and add, that it is impossible that any thing which is so happily caricatured, can be in the best taste? To your question I answer, no;—because I never considered that poetry as faultless, or its style as the best model for rising genius to adopt. I was always aware of the absurdities and affectations produced by its author's meretricious taste for ornament, and by his false system concerning poetic essentiality, viz. that nothing is poetry which is not picture; also by his intemperate use of those bold habits of style, which, moderately used, harmonize and inspirit; but, since these defects in his taste could not render me insensible to the immense powers of his genius, so neither can the broad light into which the former are thrown by this sportive mockery of rival talents, at all dim

my perception of the brightness, the splendour of the latter.

I cannot admit your Shaftsburean* principle respecting caricature; its impossibility of being happy if its object is excellent. I have frequently met with comic and witty parody of writing, which was in itself justly admirable. Several of the simply beautiful and touching parts in Shenstone's charming pastorals have been laughably burlesqued; and Sheridan, in his Critic, has thus wantoned with lovely passages in Shakespeare and Milton, particularly with Eve's enumeration and recapitulation of those objects which had delighted her in the presence of Adam, and in his absence lost the power to please. Now one single instance of disproof overthrows the despotism of an axiom.

Ridicule is certainly most powerful when it fastens upon bombast, affectation, and absurdity; but, by the power of wit, it can be very amusing without its object being in itself turgid, absurd, or affected. To be essentially ridiculous, and to be open to Ridicule, are, to my comprehension, different things. Inflation and foppery of style, are the broad marks at which she aims; but, I con-

* Lord Shaftsbury maintains, that ridicule is the test of truth.—*S.*

ceive, that all novel, daring, and grand ideas, all that we term sublime, are vulnerable to her shafts; —that pathos and simplicity themselves have not shields of proof, which can only be worn by the bard, in compositions where the reasoning powers, rather than those of the heart or the imagination, prevail.

Many of the passages in Darwin's poetry, and in the notes, are exquisitely parodied in the Loves of the Triangles; such as use, with licentious frequency, alliteration, and those hyperboles which make mountains dance, put groves into ecstasies, and render caves sulky—those successive similies, commencing with *so* and *thus*, which, however beautiful in themselves, have to their subject no similitude, and are therefore absurd in their forced application;—the long continuation of passages that begin, "Gnomes," you did this,—"Nymphs," you did that; those which tend to applaud the fiend of Europe, modern liberty; and that hypothetical extravagance in the notes, which labours, by the most ridiculous suggestions, to get rid of Deity. These appear to possess in themselves, some an obvious, and some a latent portion of the ridiculous, which this satire exposes and draws out into glaring view; and that they, therefore, are in the first class of my distinction between inherent absurdity, and that which only momen-

tarily seems absurd by the power of witty caricature.

The plan of Darwin's poem seems to me, in the second class, open to ridicule; not in itself more ridiculous than other allegories. Poetic felicity is surely in that plan, which enabled genius to invest the elementary properties with the finest imaginary forms; which empowered the poet to embody the vegetable creation; to endue its productions with passions and sentiments; to present the most striking, contrasted, and masterly landscapes to the eye of the reader, by describing the different places and scenes to which the plant or flower of his description is indigenous; to apply to poetry natural history, astronomic science, and the mechanic powers; to enlist in the service of illustration, which need not forcibly to have been applied, the stores of the author's recollection from history, fable, and anecdote. This plan was new, was comprehensive; it included the beautiful and sublime, and opened a wide field for the range of an imagination, daring, inventive, and picturesque as Darwin's: but it was open to ridicule, as our arch and able satirist has proved. It has however, on the whole, produced so much genuinely beautiful poetry, as to leave an immense preponderance of excellence in counterpoise of error:—excellence, the resistless enchantment of

which, neither this, nor any other rival necromancer has power to dissolve—at least to those whose poetic perceptions are too healthy to be palled by occasional disgust, given by the faults—into apathy to the perfections of an author:—betrayed by false taste into the first, and by genius abundantly presented with the latter. If thus, eminently master of the harmonic and picturesque graces, Darwin, who did not cultivate his poetic talent, except in short and light compositions, till he had passed his half century, had shunned the frequent fault of young poets, that of defacing his verse by ardour to adorn it: if he had felt the divine power of the simply grand, and simply beautiful, how few writers, ancient or modern, had held the light of excellence above him!

If Dr D. had been a fair and generous decider on the literary claims of others; had he been as desirous of bestowing as of receiving just praise, I should painfully sympathize with the mortification he is likely to feel, from his consciousness of the numbers whom this brilliant satire will induce to think they have admired in the wrong place, and celebrated what they ought to have despised:—who will be as ready to adopt indiscriminate and unjust contempt, as they were to feel unqualified and blind admiration. For this loss of present universal homage, I question if Dr D.'s

mind is strong enough to feel recompence in his inevitable conviction, that his poetic and his philosophic writings possess the germs of a vitality which will be coëval with the existence of the English language.

Perhaps few have sufficient fortitude to sustain, unwounded, such reverse as this satire will produce in the present opinion of the reading multitude, always composed of those who have no power of judging for themselves. Self-love might not be able to find sufficient consolation from reflecting, that the continued suffrages of the ingenious, the discerning, and generous few, must, by slow degrees, place their compositions on that high and firm ground on which, though not perhaps impeccable, they have a right to stand. Adieu.

LETTER XXI.

Miss Ponsonby.

Buxton, Aug. 9, 1798.

I CONGRATULATE my dear friends upon the sweet and, I trust, lasting repose of their fears for the state of Ireland. Alas! that it should have cost such a bleeding price: yet that the greatly worse is averted, must inspire a sense of delight from subsided terror, which the intermingled bitterness of victim-regret cannot do away.

The increasing power of my rheumatic malady, forced me to seek these springs rather than the billows of High Lake, from which I should have been thrice happy in circling home by Langollen. Thus the halcyon days, which last summer were mine, may not gild and inspirit this. If I live, and the fiend of the joints remits his persecution, I hope, next year, to see and converse with friends, to whose society my whole mind is wedded; and to see the image of that fair creature, who shed the light of happiness over many of my youthful years, honoured with so enshrined a situation.

This month is always high season at Buxton. The crowd is immense, though I never remember so few families of rank, and there is a tristful lack of elegant beaux. The male youth and middle life of England are, you know, all soldierized and gone to camps and coasts; and so a few prim parsons, and a few dancing doctors, are the forlorn hope of the belles.

And here is Mrs Powys of Berwick, in loveliness which none of them can approach, which time seems to have lost his power to tarnish, which no custom of the eye can pall.

No, dear Madam, I was not, as you suppose, favoured with a letter from General Washington, expressly addressed to myself; but, a few years after peace was signed between this country and America, an officer introduced himself, commissioned from General Washington to call upon me, and to assure me, from the General himself, that no circumstance of his life had been so mortifying as to be censured in the Monody on André, as the pitiless author of his ignominious fate: that he had laboured to save him—that he requested my attention to papers on the subject, which he had sent by this officer for my perusal.

On examining them, I found they entirely acquitted the General. They filled me with contrition for the rash injustice of my censure. With

a copy of the proceedings of the court-martial that determined Andrè's condemnation, there was a copy of a letter from General Washington to General Clinton, offering to give up André in exchange for Arnold, who had fled to the British camp, observing the reason there was to believe that the apostate General had exposed that gallant English officer to unnecessary danger to facilitate his own escape: Copy of another letter from General Washington to Major André, adjuring him to state to the commander in chief his unavoidable conviction of the selfish perfidy of Arnold, in suggesting that plan of disguise, which exposed André, if taken, to certain condemnation as a spy, when, if he had come openly in his regimentals, and under a flag of truce, to the then unsuspected American general, he would have been perfectly safe: Copy of André's high-souled answer, thanking General W. for the interest he took in his destiny; but, observing that, even under conviction of General Arnold's inattention to his safety, he could not suggest to General Clinton any thing which might influence him to save his less important life by such an exchange.

These, Madam, are the circumstances, as faithfully as I can recal them, at such a distance of time, of the interview with General Washington's friend, which I slightly mentioned to yourself and

Lady Eleanor, when I had the happiness of being with you last summer.

A pleasant friend of mine from Lichfield, accompanied me hither, a Mrs Ironmonger. She is lively and pleasing. I have the pleasure to see her please and be pleased, in a scene of great gaiety, compared to our quiet little city, notwithstanding the diminution of splendour and elegance that used to grace through the golden-hued Crescent, whirl over its area, or flit beneath its chandeliers.

We have a very pleasant society at St Anne's Hotel. Our most intimate acquaintance, an interesting Irish family: Amiable, graceful Lady Newcomine, and her three lovely and very engaging daughters, with whom we walk and go to to the rooms. Captain and Mrs Bingham and her sister, a beautiful and sprightly little woman. Charming Mrs Childers will soon arrive, and pour her intellectual brightness over this scene.

Literary characters are as scarce here as nobility. I miss the eloquence of Erskine and Wilberforce more than the titles.

Adieu, dearest Madam, and believe me always faithfully yours.

LETTER XXII.

MRS CHILDERS.

Belmont, Sept. 19, 1798.

You, my beloved friend, whose health appeared to receive that benefit from Buxton air and springs, which they refused to my longer residence, continue, I warmly hope, to perceive their salutary influence;—that your internal pains have not resumed their baleful tyranny. I hope, also, that the wanness and languor which we used to observe about the fair face and tall *embonpoint* figure of your youthful Anna, are vanished like the scattered clouds of April, before the rising beams of approaching May. Nor less do I hope that headachs, too customary with your Harriet, have not repressed the bodily and intellectual energies of that dear young doctor in petticoats. Never will I forget, or coldly recollect, her attention to my deranged health and precarious safety. Both were in jeopardy at Matlock, and neither escaped without injury.

Ignorance and ill-luck dictated my application, by letter, to the old hotel, once Mason's, for good

and comfortable apartments. Its master answered my application with a promise, which, perhaps from the clamour of crowds pressing for admittance, he most inadequately fulfilled.

Absurdity and bad taste, heirs-apparent of that despot Fashion, lead the fine, and would-be fine, people to throng into that inconvenient and decayed habitation, with its countless doors; blind passages, with lurking unsuspected steps; plaster floors with holes; steep and broken stone staircases; small, low, and dirty bed-chambers, with one little sash-window, and no chimney to ventilate the repeatedly breathed air; old fusty stuff-beds, and blankets dusky from long and, perhaps, not very cleanly occupation.

Feebleness and invalidism might almost as safely walk in woods full of spring-guns, and steel-traps, as poke about that mutilated and superannuated mansion, in which I got a violent fall, that bruised me considerably, but from which, thank God, I escaped unfractured.

Venturing into the bath the day after our arrival, its comparatively cold and heavy waters, produced great accession of rheumatic pain, which still remains with me. It was fixed by the damps ascending from the river, and which, in the three rainy days of our destined week, came in at every open door and gaping window. Thus my stay in

that Eden of England, as to scenery, will send me home with a great increase of the malady, for the dispersion of which I roved. Woods so luxuriant and so near, retain and give back the moistness of a showery atmosphere, long after the sky has cleared.

Of absurdity and bad taste, the politer resorters to Matlock cannot surely be acquitted in flocking to the old hotel, since there is a large, commodious, and cleanly habitation, at the top of the hill, on a lawny space, whose opposite rocks, lavishly curtained, with the river rolling at their feet, present a much finer scene, and dispense purer air, than the central receptacle can boast; while the lately-built house, at the bottom of the hill, contains large, lightsome, pleasant, sashed apartments, furnished with every possible convenience, and even elegance. Its situation, though in the vale, is picturesque and beautiful in the first degree. It looks up to a pyramidal mountain, covered with dark woods, with bold rocks on either hand, the plenteous foliage descending from the mountain's top, and dipping its long boughs in the river, which, round the convex base of the mountain, brawls over a rocky channel, and winds away into the right-hand thickets. Both these mansions have a bath and spring within themselves.

The old and middle hotel receives little beauty from the river, of which it only catches a distant and short reach, in which the stream appears dull, and has no graceful course.

All the three houses, on our arrival, were full; but, in the two so preferable, as to scenery and comfort, the inhabitants seemed of an inferior class, destitute of that nameless something which, even in silence, generally distinguishes those who have trod, from their birth, the path of independence. The inconvenient abode presented several strangers of that latter class to our attention, and also several whose talents were above the level of mere politeness.

In speaking of the two better hotels, and their inferiority as to company, I ought to have excepted the transient intellectual treasure which I found in the lower mansion, Miss Lee of Bath, author of the Recess, &c. Two of her pupils were with her, one of whom is Miss Tickel, daughter to the sweet warbler, Mary Linley, who married Mr Tickel, and niece to the British Cecilia, the late Mrs Sheridan. This young lady sung to us with a thin, weak, but pretty voice, that wanted the sustaining power of instrumental accompaniment, and which, besides, was not modulated with Linleyan skill. She gave me, however, an oppor-

tunity which I had wished for, of hearing the ballad sung which I made for Rauzzini to set, and which was so often sung at Bath last winter,— "O! why my locks so yellow," &c. It is sweetly adorned by the recitative and air.

Miss Lee and I loitered an whole hour, one amber morning, on the banks of the prattling river. We were in interesting conversation, which she is eminently capable of supporting.

My friends, Dr and Mrs Stokes of Chesterfield, were my guests at Matlock three days. The light and diminutive form of the latter, contains a strong and cultured mind, and a poetic imagination. She is somewhat fastidious in her appreciation of the apparent worth and merit of strangers; but rates high, and perhaps partially, that of her friends. A hardness in sounding the consonants, which mark the provinciality of Derbyshire and Lancashire, is so great a disadvantage to the grace of her conversation, as scarcely to be balanced by the uncommon strength of her ideas, the efflorescence of her fancy, and the accuracy of her language. It is, in a degree, inimical to the existence of that subtle essence of gentlewoman, which you and I have endeavoured to analyze;— which, since it diffuses its spirit even in silence, we agreed, could not consist *wholly* in the voice;

yet, with those inelegant cadences which at once ascertain the county of the speaker, it can have little operation.

Dr Stokes is an extremely skilful physician, on the testimony of the ingenious and candid of his own profession, and on the proofs of his successful treatment of several very difficult and dangerous cases. His devotion to the study of medicine, and those sciences most nearly connected with it, as chemistry, botany, and mineralogy, has not allowed him to cultivate his taste for eloquence and poetry, sufficiently to authorize those unhesitating decisions on their subjects, which have often more tenacity than happiness. His voice in speaking, and his address, have each that insinuating softness which his wife's want, and which evince at once the man of education and the gentleman. It is curious to observe how totally these graces forsake him when he reads either oratoric prose or verse aloud. He has absolutely no impassioned or metrical intonation, but, instead of it, the oddest cadences, that have no congeniality with the passion or sentiment which the words express. An author's vanity could meet no severer damp than from hearing Dr S. read his or her compositions. He has the art of sinking the manly melodies of Milton's blank

verse into the vapidness of Phillips* and of Glover's; and the sweetness of Pope's, and the richness of Darwin's rhyme, into the insipidity of Blackmore's, and of the worst of our modern versifiers.

I talked with Dr Stokes of your malady. He assured me, and he is no boaster, that he had, in two instances, restored the natural power of the intestines, after it had been lost during several years. I fervently wish you would consult him without delay.

You will see, by the date of this letter, that we have lingered long in the shades of Belmont. Its sylvan steeps and romantic vales, have more varied charms than Matlock. Lovely and differently featured from each other are the vallies and glens that sink between its cradling woods. The superiority of Matlock, as one scene, to the environs of Belmont, results from the nobler height of the mountains, and the ampler and more meandering course of the Derwent; its more rocky channel; its clearer and more frothing waters; yet the Churnet, that laves the base of these steeps, pours not his lesser urn in vain for the purposes of scenic beauty.

* Author of the poem called Cyder.

Our reception here has been infinitely kind and friendly. Prosperity is Mrs Sneyd's shining time, and that it is not to the generality of people. We have made several agreeable visits, and, for the domestic and unfettered hours, the sources of interesting amusement to guests, who have mind, are various and considerable. When Mr Sneyd purchased this wide domain, some twenty-five years back, it was but a desert, with fine capabilities, which his taste has cultivated. Nor merely scenic and argricultural have been his pursuits. He has, through life, roved, like the bee, over the fields of science, and brought to his sylvan hive a portion of honey from all their flowers. A library of curious as well as classic literature; pictures, prints, drawings, statues, medals, and minerals, present all sort of aliment to mental taste.

I hope to be at home on Monday, where my whole heart would rejoice to see you and yours.

LETTER XXIII.

MRS SNEYD.

Lichfield, Oct. 2, 1798.

I AM much concerned to hear from Mrs Mallet, that your recovery is yet incomplete, and that you are ordered to Cheltenham. You must pass through Lichfield. If, in the meantime, your convalescence advances more rapidly than was expected when Mr Sneyd wrote to Mrs Mallet, I trust you will exchange the purpose of trying Cheltenham springs in favour of your native air, and stay beneath my roof to the last hour your inclination shall dictate, or your plans permit.

My pen has melancholy tidings to convey—the death of my long-valued friend, Mrs Mompessan, —hence these epistolary symbols of mourning. She, dear soul, put on its raiments for my sister, my mother, and my father;—it is meet that I wear them for her. The event took place the 24th of last month. It was a great surprise as well as shock to me, since I received a letter from her, when I was at Buxton, dated August

15th, which spoke cheerily of her health in general, though it confessed an increase of her old asthmatic complaint. Since that period, it seems, a dropsy in the chest came on, and deprived her acquaintance of a most delightful and instructive companion; those who loved her, of a fervently attached friend; and the poor of her village of a generous protectress, attentive to all their wants, and interested in their welfare. Death never chilled a warmer heart, or translated a spirit of more spotless integrity. While life is given me, I shall cherish her memory.

Mr Newton has put an immense sponge upon Dr Falconer's reproach to his miserism. He has vested L. 20,000 stock, from the three per cents., in trustees hands, for the purpose of building twenty houses, as habitations for clergymen's widows, or aged unmarried daughters, whose income may not exceed L. 30 per annum. These houses are to form an handsome approach to the west front of our cathedral; to commence on the spot where cousin White's house now stands, extending down the gullet, which will be widened to admit carriages to pass each other, which at present they cannot do. The tenements are to be gothicized, and endowed with a salary of L. 40 per ann. to each inhabitant.

My cousins will be grieved to quit the beloved

and cheerful old mansion, in which they were born, and passed the smiling years of a social and happy youth. I feel for them much, and you will feel for them, since you, as well as myself, have ever cherished local impressions, and know how the connected images of pleasures past impart their stamp and semblance to the scenes amid which they sprung.

And poor Mr Archdeacon Leigh, he too

> "Fears no more the heat of the sun,
> Nor the furious winter's rages."

He does not pass away unregretted. I believe he had an excellent heart, and I am sure he had very entertaining talents. Of late years his manners towards me, always obliging, wore great semblance of increased regard. Mr Saville deplores his loss, for to him Mr Leigh's conduct was ever and invariably that of a paternal friend.

Belmont looked spitefully lovely, as we bowled round your mountain, that golden Sunday morning on which we left you; and so looked the little Gothic hypocrite* at the bottom of the hill, who feeds chickens while she pretends to reform sinners.

* The poultry-house, formed and painted like a Gothic chapel—*S.*

Adieu! we shall meet in a few days, and happily, I trust, from the advanced state of your recovery.

LETTER XXIV.

Rev. H. J. Todd, on receiving his edition of Milton's Comus.

Lichfield, Oct. 19, 1798.

I thank you, Sir, for the literary present with which you have honoured me. This rich edition of Comus will be dear to every mind, susceptible of local impressions, and interested in those circumstances which are connected with the pursuits, feelings, and compositions of illustrious genius, who wish to see them cleared from the dark shadows of time. The unwearied energy of your researches has removed those shadows.

All who delight in tracing a great author to his sources, and in observing the congeniality between exalted minds, where resemblance of thought and expression is, from its slightness, perhaps rather coincident than imitative, will not only read, but

often recur to your ingenious and learned volume. Such readers will honour the author for his extensive knowledge of English poetry, and for the discriminating justice of his critical remarks. They will be grateful to him for the valuable additions he has made to the affluence of Mr T. Warton's poetic illustrations. Your preface to this happily elaborate compilation is admirable.

The triumph of classic vanity over his better judgment, often betrayed Milton into Pagan allusions in the Paradise Lost, highly improper in a poem whose subject was of such consecrated sanctity. In Lycidas, he has so finely managed, and so sweetly apologized for the mixture of mythology, that he converts a fault into a beauty;—but it is not so in that local anachronism in Comus, where the attendant spirit would endow the Severn with the properties of Pactolus.

In Fletcher's Faithful Shepherdess, Amoret's votive address to the river is surely much more beautiful from its accurate simplicity, however that in Comus may excel it in the grandeur of harmonic numbers. Fletcher's is doubtless an imitation of the similar invocation in the yet older poet, Brown, whom, rather than Fletcher, I should think Milton imitated; but Fletcher, in his imitation of the same writer, has shewn a more

just taste than his greater successor, by abstaining from the fault of his model, the invocation of impossible gifts.

You mention the late Headly's work with more distinction than I think it merits. The author's bigotted preference of the first rude blocks of English poetry to the finished statues which later writers carved from them, is surely contemptible. He quarrels with those later writers, and with the moderns, for just ornaments and fertile extension, yet passes no censure on that stiff infelicity of expression, on the quaintness, the quibbling, and the playing with an idea, as a cat plays with a mouse; on the utter want of harmonious flow in the numbers, which characterize our verse from Chaucer's time till Spenser's; and Spenser's sonnets and madrigals, as well as the detached poems of our immortal Shakespeare, are strongly tinctured with them—neither, a little later still, did Cowley and Davenant escape their infection.

Headly mistook awkwardness for simplicity. He had the stupid arrogance to call, in his volume, the most interesting love-poem in our, or perhaps in any language, the Henry and Emma, Matt's versification-piece, preferring to it the old ballad, which has little merit, except that it suggested the plan to Prior, and furnished him with some embryo ideas, awakened into life and beauty by a

Promethean pen. The exquisite poem is entirely Prior's own; and, besides its intrinsic excellence, how infinitely does it increase the interest of the dialogue!

He who could complain of extension, when all the constituent properties of fine poetry, lofty sentiment, poetic landscape, graceful picture, and the natural and pathetic effusions of an impassioned heart, produce that extension, is just as competent to poetic criticism, as a man would be to write upon statuary and painting, who prefers a carved barber's block to the Apollo Belvidere, or Mother Redcap on a sign-post to the Madona of Raphael.

I have the honour to remain, Sir, &c.

LETTER XXV.

EDMUND WIGLEY, ESQ.

Lichfield, Oct. 12, 1798.

I CONGRATULATE you upon Admiral Nelson's glorious victory. It is great for England; and yet I fear it will not give us peace, the most desirable fruit of bloody victories.

The three captive generals of the Irish invasion are here. They have called upon me, introduced by a French gentleman, resident in Lichfield before the revolutionary volcano, from its Parisian crater, burst over Europe.

General Humbert is rather an handsome man, and polite in his address; much more externally polished than the Generals Saraszin and Fontaine; but none of them know any thing of English, and my ignorance of French clogged our converse with the tediousness of interpretation.

The restraints these gentlemen laid upon the depredations and murderous purposes of the savage Irish, entitle them to the civility they met from Lord Cornwallis and his officers; but they will meet with no general attention here. It would be better if the good people of this city would take other methods of reiterating the proofs of their unquestioned loyalty, than by a violation of that precept of the Gospel, of all others the most important to the interests of morality: "Do unto others as ye would they should do unto you." Let them imagine their husbands, sons, and brothers prisoners in France, and as they would the French should treat them, so treat the prisoners of that country thrown on our mercy. Such liberality could do no harm; and, if universally prevalent, might do

much good, by softening the national rancour between the two states, and inducing a mutual wish to sheath the sword of desolation. I lately heard the brave Mr Ormsby of Dublin say, who has so gallantly exerted himself against the rebels in his native Ireland, "I called upon the French generals when I was in Lichfield: the instant a man is a prisoner, I forget that he was a foe." I honoured him for the nobleness of the sentiment.—Such an oblivious power ought the misfortunes of our enemies to possess over every mind.

LETTER XXVI.

THOMAS DOWDESWELL, ESQ.

Lichfield, Oct. 29, 1798.

I HAVE been recently informed of your marriage with Miss Paisley—a young lady whose merits have been so represented in the letters of the late amiable Miss Wingfield, as to make this intelligence extremely welcome.

Such a marriage was the wisest plan you could pursue; the most probable means of softening

the misfortune of your life*, and of consoling that loneliness of heart, inevitable upon the loss of a sincere attentive friend and daily associate,—a loss which the casual and interrupted society of common minds could not recompence.

You have now anchored your happiness upon the firmest, yet tenderest, and most indissoluble of all friendships. She who could be wanting in any of its duties towards you, must be the reverse of Mrs Dowdeswell—must want that softness and kindness of temper, which, uniting pity with love and esteem, will produce that constant attention to which Shakespeare's beautiful definition of Mercy applies, when he says its quality is not *forced*,

> " But droppeth, like the gentle dew from heaven,
> Upon the place beneath. It is twice bless'd,
> It blesseth him that gives, and him that takes,
> Is loveliest in the lovely, and becomes
> The wife of Dowdeswell better than her beauty."

Though I have not the pleasure to know the lady of your choice, I presume upon the friendship with which you honour me, to present my congratulatory compliments to her, as well as to your-

* Colonel Dowdeswell lost his eye-sight before he was thirty years of age.—*S.*

self, together with those wishes for your mutual happiness, which are felt with a fervour that passes far over the cold bounds of ceremony.

Mr Saville and his daughter, some of the most grateful of many whom your kindness has served and delighted, desire permission to present their congratulations on an event from which we all promise ourselves more peace and felicity to our excellent friend, than he has long, if ever, known.

I rejoice with you upon the successes of our gallant admirals. May they induce our proud foes to offer or to accept reasonable terms of conciliation; and may our rulers, instead of being inflated, by the pride of our naval conquests, into their former guilty contempt of the miseries of war, awaken to a sense of pity for the woes which the rival ambition of England and France have occasioned, since the mischievous revolution of 1789; and may those, with whom power is invested in each country, learn to prize the safety and happiness of their respective nation, above the proudest glory that can result from sanguinary triumphs!

I have the honour to remain, dear Sir, &c.

LETTER XXVII.

Rev. T. S. Whalley.

Lichfield, Nov. 13, 1798.

The sight of your handwriting on my table, increased the pleasure I have hitherto almost always felt on returning to this scene, after an absence of many weeks; but, alas! ere I had been a fortnight at home, a dark cloud descended to shroud the sunny smile of my Lares—the announced death of dear Mrs Mompessan. Six weeks of last winter she was my guest:

> "And she was one who, when the wind and rain
> Beat dark December, knew well to discourse
> The freezing hours away."

A letter, that spoke cheerily of her health, came to me at Buxton but one short month before her death. No information of its since changed state had reached me. Thus was I wholly unprepared for the shock. This final letter had pressed my going to her at Woodhouse, ere I left a place which neighboured it so much more nearly than

Lichfield. Unapprehensive of her danger, as she herself then was, I feared for my rheumatic complaints, still heavy upon me, the autumnal damps of a spot so low, so irriguous, and embowered; and, as we had been very recently together, begged her to excuse my compliance. Had I suspected an existence, which I so valued, was near its close, I should have obeyed her injunction. My ignorance of her danger preserved me from the shock of witnessing the near approach of her dissolution—probably the sad event itself; but I could not voluntarily have shrunk from the mournful duties of such hours.

I believe you know that she had been invariably attached to me from my sixteenth year—the indulgent friend and confident of my youthful pleasures and pains, though twenty years my senior. Amidst a certain eccentric and sturdy wilfulness in some of her habits, I have seldom known a better, and never a happier woman. Her mind had great energy; strength of understanding, firmness of purpose, and promptness of action. She knew much of life, of characters, of manners; and had explored them on the continent as well as at home. In historic and chronologic knowledge, from wonderful memory, she was a living library. Her language had vigour and ease; and, if she was warm on her subject, eloquence; but

she had not sufficiently cultivated her imagination to relish poetry or painting; and it was one of her little *mulisms* to fancy and assert that she could not understand verse. She loved music, from a naturally good ear, but was a stranger to the noblest delight it can impart, and which results from its union with beautiful poetry. Her truth was unswerving, her sincerity taintless, and a warmer heart towards her friends never beat in the human bosom. Her affections, her enthusiasm, her zeal to serve them, and even her slightest acquaintance, when opportunity offered, were unchilled by age and disappointing experience, and preserved, till her last hour, the energy and unsoiled simplicity of youth. I do verily believe she enjoyed every fortunate occurrence in the destiny of her friends, and even in that of her mere acquaintance, yet more and longer than they themselves enjoyed it. To her it came unallayed. She was never weary of thinking and talking on the subject; of looking back to the disquiets it had dissipated, and to the peace and pleasures it promised.

Thus was her vivid sympathy a source of constant delight, while the pains it occasioned, from the misfortunes and sorrows of her connections and acquaintance, though very keen for a time, were, ere long, consoled by religious resignation, and cheered by the ascending power of a cheerful

temperament. Then her perfect intimacy with all the great events and distinguished persons recorded on the historic tablets, proved her mind's refuge from the too long pressure of useless sorrows. She was pious without austerity, and generous on a very limited income. What recompensing qualities for a repulsive exterior? Extremely well descended, she had some family pride, and an infinite portion of political bigotry on the side of unconstitutional submission to kingly and ministerial power. Dear soul! if any person spoke a word against Mr Pitt, for the belligerent flames he has spread over Europe, she used to put her fingers into her ears, when amongst those with whom she was familiar, and to leave the room when with those before whom she could not, in politeness, take that liberty, for she was very well-bred.

I hear, as I expected to hear, that she is extremely lamented by all ranks of people in the vicinity of her pleasant home, which the pretty brook that passed through her garden, her love of landscape, and out-door employment, had rendered so crystal, so lawny, and so sylvan. Her wealthy neighbours have lost a most entertaining and instructive companion, the indigent around her a steady friend, earnest to relieve their wants, to the last limits of discreet generosity, and ever

ready to compose their feuds by arbritation, on the impartial justice of which experience had taught them to rely. The following sentence is in her will: " As a memorial of our long friendship, I leave to Miss Seward twenty of my books, and desire she may have the first choice." I wear, as it is meet I should, those mourning garments for her, which, though no ties of blood subsisted, she wore for my angelic sister—my mother—my father. Her memory is consecrated in my heart, which does not suffer those it loved to lie forgotten in the grave.

I will not apologize to you for having sketched her portrait upon so wide a canvas. She was no every-day character.

To the interesting pages of your letter my attention shall now be turned. I had mourned your sullen abjuration of the muses, when the day-star of your hopes had shot madly from her radiant sphere, into the irremeable gulf of disgrace and misery. I thought that needless resolve an unwise rejection of the sweetest and most healing balm which imagination can pour upon the wounds of the heart. Thus I could not but rejoice in the resurrection of your poetic taste and powers. I congratulate you that their first fruits are so soon to meet the public eye. I hope Mrs

Siddons, for whose filial loss I am truly concerned, will be enabled to give your tragedy the high advantage of her matchless energies and graces. I long to know its title and subject. Lord Carlisle, they tell me, is going to produce a tragedy on the story of Dryden's beautiful poem, the Guiscard and Sigismunda.

You are pleased with Colonel Addington, and I am not less delighted with his sister, the elegant, the eloquent, and interesting Mrs Good-enough, with whom I had lately the pleasure of passing a few hours of very rapid wing.

Ah, friend! how political prejudice can betray into uncandid decision the clearest heads and kindest hearts! You perceive I allude to the sentences which close your letter. You say, "If Arthur O'Connor's confessions do not damn Fox and his party, nothing can. If they were dupes, they are not fit to be trusted, for want of judgment; and if they were themselves traitors, still less, as the enemies of their country." Your last *if* is conclusive—not so your first. You forgot, when you drew your inference, the truth and wisdom of Milton's fine observation, to which the events of your own life have, from the ingenuousness of your temper, borne frequent testimony:

" Nor yet, nor man, nor angel can discern
Hypocrisy, the only evil that walks
Invisible, except to God alone,
By his permissive will, through heaven and earth.
And oft, though wisdom wake, suspicion sleeps
At wisdom's gate, and to simplicity
Resigns her charge."

That it for once beguiled the clearest sighted of of all our politicians is certain; but if that single instance of dupism can unfit a man, or set of men, for the service of the state, how totally must the so far out-numbering instances in which Mr Pitt has been duped, in the face of all Europe, disqualify him for retaining the reasonable confidence of the people of England!

Adieu! and believe, what is most true, that it is not in the wide difference of our opinion concerning those measures which may best preserve the weal of this country, to alienate from you any portion of my esteem and regard.

LETTER XXVIII.

MISS PONSONBY.

Lichfield, Nov. 15, 1798.

MOST sincerely, dearest Madam, do I sympathize with your and Lady Eleanor's anxieties and sorrows, of triple source, patriotism, consanguinity, and friendship. Ah! wretched Ireland, how dire is the insecurity of thy inhabitants! In other civil wars, barbarities as dreadful have been committed;—witness that in the Duke of Ormond's time, of which Phelim O'Neale was the Holt;—but when the contest became hopeless, the sanguinary thirst ceased. Now a fiend-like fury prevails—murder for the sake of murder, sparing neither sex, infancy, or age, nor even waiting for the spur of personal revenge.

I see, with the deepest concern, and the most desponding fears for the result, the success of this country's renewed incendiarisms on the continent. Ah, Heaven! is it thus the English nation shews its gratitude to thee for the signal, the glorious victories, with which thou hast blest our fleets! How much more worthy a wise, a humane, a

Christian nation, instead of goading on the emperor to set the existence of the German empire on one desperate cast, to have said to France,— "Let the exterminating sword be sheathed. Meet us with reasonable terms of reconcilement, and we will find our noblest pride in shewing you, and the whole world, that our naval victories have not shut our hearts to compassion for the miseries our continued warfare must produce to both nations."

I now hasten to obey your injunction, and speak my sentiments of the poetical merits and defects of that exquisite picture of a transcript, "The Little Grey Man," which you have taken the kind trouble to trace. It has some few pleasing, and some few fine images; but there is so much of ludicrous about the Little Grey Man himself, that I confess I am more inclined to laugh than to shudder at him. Then the course of the tale is so distorted from nature and probability; is so totally void of sentiment or moral, as to induce my belief that it is the poem of which I heard at Buxton, said to be written by Mr Bunbury, in ridicule of the German stories, and the prevailing taste for supernatural horrors. Considered in this light, it is more acceptable to my taste, than if I thought its author in earnest to vie with the terrible graces of Alonzo and Imogen, or of, in

Spencer's translation, the far sublimer Leonora. In those poems, the perjured inconstancy of one heroine, and the blasphemous despair of the other, are justly punished.

Surely, in the protection of her father's house, and amid groups of human beings, Mary Jeane must naturally think she could better have defended herself from the renewed visits of the hideous tenant of the grave, than alone on the wild hills of St Bertrand, amid the tangled woods of Limeburgh, and on the Golgotha of Sombremond*. Is that name, so adapted to the scene, real?

Though I cannot think the author of this wild work serious, yet the subject seems to have irresistibly led him to exhibit, among his mock-terrifics, some pictures that have the genuine grandeur of horror, and some natural touches of simple beauty. The style, in general, is so meagre, that, if he can be thought in earnest, we must believe him, with many other versifiers, mistaking silliness for simplicity.

* In the prelude to this strange poem, it is asserted, that, on certain plains on the high-roads in Germany, the bodies of malefactors are exposed on wheels and gibbets; and that pilgrim travellers often pass the night amid those dire groups, to secure themselves from the living banditti that, infesting the highways, will yet not approach the mangled carcasses of their associates.—*S.*

I discern no fine features of either style till the twelfth stanza; and there only in the third and fourth lines. I like the thirteenth extremely. In that, the pilgrim, looking back on the cheerful lights of the town, is natural and pleasing picture. The fourteenth finely describes the dreary journey; the fifteenth, as finely, the horrors of the plain of Sombremond; the sixteenth has nothing striking; the seventeenth is striking; the eighteenth grander still: its picture of the raven is the gem of the composition; and as it is new as to position and action, so is it sublime:

"And he croak'd round the wheel as he heavily flew."

The vultures of the next couplet are common-place, in comparison; aiming to be more, they are poetically much less impressive.

The fourth line of the nineteenth stanza is also grandly horrid; but the Little Grey Man on the field of battle, is again too ludicrous to be dreadful; and a twenty-three days walk for a man deeply wounded, outrages, not only the probable, but the possible. The real-life events ought to be natural, even where the machinery is supernatural.

The nine ensuing stanzas, till the last line of the twenty-eighth, might have been written by any common versifier:—

" Gave him one look of love, 'twas her fondest and last,"

Is a sweet line. In the next stanza, the Little Grey Man becomes a fiend, after Fuzeli's own heart, who has a passion for blending the ludicrous with the horrible; but the effect is seldom good, either on his canvas, or on the poet's page. And for what purpose, except to burlesque fiendism, is this absurd demon empowered to murder the amiable, unoffending lovers? The next verse is again sublime—the bell tolling over the heath, is still a fine, though somewhat hacknied, accompaniment to ghostism; but

" Wild to the blast flew the sculls and the bones,"

Is grand as any of Dante's terrifics. The ensuing stanza, though soberized, is very good; and there the ballad ought to have closed, for the remainder is common writing, and reminds us, to its own disadvantage, of the simpler and sublimer termination of Tickel's Colin and Lucy:—awful is that moral lesson, so totally wanting in this odd tale.

LETTER XXIX.

MRS CHILDERS.

Lichfield, Dec. 23, 1798.

I GRIEVE to find from your last, that no abatement of your internal malady has taken place since we parted at Buxton, nor can conceive what operation in surgery could serve you; but if it might, if, by suffering even great increase of pain for a time, your health could be restored, your precious life prolonged, surely for the sake of your husband, daughters, sister, and friends, you would submit to endure it with a resolution worthy the affections of your heart, the strength of your mind, and the fervour of your piety. I pray to God that it may not be necessary,—that milder applications may so arrest the progress of the complaint, and assuage its pains, that they may neither shorten nor embitter existence.

Your Harriet is a noble girl,—one of that thinly-peopled class, who live for others rather than for themselves, and in whom the social passions prevail over the selfish ones. To an heart so tempered, expanded, exalted, such a mother

must be dear in a degree certain to produce sorrow and affectionate resentment, that it could be thought possible she should consent to pass this winter in town; that dissipation—the charm of polished circles, and even the renewal of former friendships, could be tasted, while you languished beneath the pressure of long-existing disease. A sensibility so inseparable from her character, rather confirms my esteem than excites it.

Your counter Sunday Morn*, so rich in piety and poetic beauty, was not first shewn to Mr Gisborne by Mrs Jones. I gave it to his neighbour, Mr Baily, desiring he would shew the poem to Mr Gisborne, assured that he would admire it, and esteem the author for its sake. Mr Baily returned it the next day, saying that he had executed my commission, and that the lines had extremely pleased Mr Gisborne.

With his Forest Walks I have been familiar from their first publication. Against those who allow their author strong abilities, knowledge, and unwearied application, but deny him genius, I have uniformly asserted his claim to that primeval irradiation, on the testimony of that work. He has looked at nature with his own eyes, and to do that happily belongs only to people of ge-

* In opposition to Southey's poem of that title.—*S.*

nius. We find vital touches in the landscapes and imagery of the Forest Walks, never found in those of the book-made versifier. It is true, Mr Gisborne's verse is not of the happiest construction. Its pauses are not sufficiently varied to produce that rich flow of harmony that winds along the numbers of the Paradise Lost, and of Thomson's Seasons; neither has it the dignity of Akenside, or of Mason's; nor the fascinating union of strength and simplicity which we find in the Shakespearean measures of Crow's Lewesdon Hill; in Cowper's Task, and in the blank verse of Coleridge and Southey: But this objection solely respects the metrical construction of the Forest Walks, for they contain a number of passages

> ——————" that glisten in the Muse's ray,
> " With orient hues, unborrowed of the sun *."

I do not question Mr Gisborne's powers in conversation, to please, to interest, to instruct; nor wonder that you speak of them so highly. Me he sought not. I dare believe he cannot pardon the sin of avowed authorism in woman, especially where her subjects are not solely religious. I should have regretted his neglect more, but for that sour and narrow spirit of Calvinism which

* Gray.

tinctures his writings. Towards the end of the Fourth Walk, Autumn, he says religion is the only theme which gives poetry a title to genuine praise.

Thus, with Gothic barbarism, would he condemn to oblivious neglect the works of Spencer, of Shakespeare, the lesser poems of Milton, and all the lovely poetic constellations that have moved, and yet move, in rapidly increasing number, round those suns.

Dr Johnson, unquestionably religious, though not amiable, and clear of judgment, where neither party-prejudice or literary jealousy arose to darken it, gives a very different opinion on that subject. I think it will be found in his Life of Watts. The passage commences—"Let no pious Christian be offended, if I presume to say that religion is not the most desirable subject for poetry." He proceeds to give his reasons. I have not the book to refer to, nor can I recollect the sentences with verbal precision, but they are to the following effect:—It is necessary to the perfection of poetry, that the imagination should be heated and raised; a state of mind which, however suited to the dark oracles of partial inspiration in the Jewish religion, is not consonant to the sober simplicity of Christian devotion. Poetry is the essence of fancy and fiction; and, provided it does not violate the purity and piety

of the heart, should generally keep at awful distance from themes that require the meek subjection of the passions.

In consequence of your having so warmly admired Southey's Hymn to the Penates, I have reperused it attentively. I like it much better than Akenside's Hymn to the Naiads, with which the author draws it into a sort of comparison. Akenside is a favourite poet of mine; but that hymn, though stately in its style, and profoundly classical, appears to me, I could almost say, profoundly dull. Southey's hymn opens beautifully, and has several lovely passages, but I think it spun out too long, and that it has great moral defects. After the full stop in the seventh line, the verses to the middle of the thirteenth are classic lumber, heavy, and superfluous; then they become interesting again, and so continue till the absurd disgusting invocation to the benignant powers, that they will permit him to place misanthropy beneath the protection of his Lares. Falsely has this poet declared the origin of his acknowledged favourite; never could simplicity and benevolence produce such a monster!—no crimes of individuals, no injuries received from an individual, nor yet a general misconstruction of his character, ever made a good man misanthropic.

It is a pleasing fancy to suppose the Penates

are the spirits of the dead; but it is interrupted by the digression in praise of truth, which is there totally out of its place, and is one of those passages which encumber the poem; neither do we like, in the train of thought this composition inspires, to have our attention drawn off to Spencer and his allegories.

Then it is a bold assertion, that the regions of heaven can give the human soul no such true delight, as it must feel in the permission to hover round the objects it loved and has left on earth. Waving its presumption, the passage is interesting and poetic. That presumption adds nothing to its fanciful charms.—How easy to have avoided it thus, while the inapposite digression might have been lopt away—addressing the Penates,

> " A dearer interest to the human race
> Links you, yourselves the spirits of the dead;
> Nor yet unworthy of an angel's bliss
> To hover o'er its earthly haunts, and feel
> When with the breeze it glides around * the brow
> Of one beloved on earth."

We love the apostrophe to his lost friend, Mr Seward, who was my distant relation, and the

* *Glides* around, instead of *wantons* round. The word *wantons* is too gay for the occasion.—*S.*

little history of Syrophanes, not naturally connected with the subject of the poem, but which yet we should be sorry to spare.

The passage which begins, " Often at eve my wanderings," is lovely, till again the author turns out of his interesting path to libel our laws, and profanely to invoke his Maker not to hurl his thunder on the felons—implying, that it ought to descend rather on those who made and who administered the edicts that punish them.

The remainder is a dull heavy prophecy of a state wholly incompatible with the nature of man,—what never was, and what never will be; and thus, like the " baseless fabric of a dream," it leaves nothing on the mind or heart; but this censure respects only the conclusion, for there are many touches and impressive passages in the course of the poem; though I still avow a preference, as poetry, of the Ode on New Year's Day in that volume, to this its Hymn to the Penates—since that is, though shorter, perfect.

Supernatural horrors are the taste of the times Have you seen the Ancient Mariner. It is the greatest *quiz* of a composition I ever met with—but it has very fine strokes of genius. The style of obsolete simplicity suits the unmeaning wildness of its plan, and of its terrific features. The moral of this oddity is not less defective in ration-

ality than the plan. Enormous punishments are decreed to a trifling crime; and, besides that, two hundred people, innocent of even that trifling crime, are its victims, while the person who committed it escapes death. Of the softer beauties of writing, rare are the instances in the Ancient Mariner; yet, in one verse, they shed their mild light. My recollection of that verse is probably not accurate, but it is to this effect:

> " The sails kept on a gentle noise,
> Like a little huddling rill,
> All in the leafy month of June,
> That to the sleeping woods at night,
> Singeth a quiet tune."

The rhymes have nothing like regularity, neither has the measure, as to quantity; and old words are used, which have so long been discarded, that they cannot, but by the context, be understood;—such as, " they nold," for they did not; and " the eldrich deck," whose meaning none of us can guess.

I adjure you to publish your Sunday Morn in some of the public prints. If you cannot conquer an unfounded dislike to be poetically known, at least print it anonymously; yet, for our sex's credit, say, " by a Lady." For the sake of national piety, deprive not the rising youth of this age of a composition so beautifully calculated to

endear public worship to their taste, and to their heart! Adieu! adieu!

LETTER XXX.

Mrs Jackson.

Lichfield, Jan. 2, 1799.

The receding influence of that hope, which, in compliance with my wishes, you were so good to invite, disappoints me much. Thus life glides away, and society with our kindred spirits, one of its dearest charms, is dealt to us thriftily. Nor is that all; arbitrary circumstances, not content with their withholding power, will seldom leave those minds which possess resources to inspirit retirement, the choice of preferring it to uninteresting companionship; to that sort of association which gives the understanding and the imagination sensations, similar to those the body fee's when beneath a roof too low to admit its standing upright.

It is very true, the style of our letters, even without any purpose of insincerity, must not always be depended upon as barometers of our cheer-

fulness or depression. Various ideas often arise while we write, that induce superficial gaiety, when discontent may weigh about the bosom; or they may be of a contrary nature, shrouding, for the interval, that sunshine of the spirits which might prevail when we took up the pen; and this adventitious influence may be involuntary. At other times, we are perhaps unwilling that our friend should perceive any latent disquiet of heart, whose cause may be complicated and difficult to explain, while, unexplained, it might alarm, and be imputed to more serious infelicity than that from whence it sprung. Then it is that we endeavour to conceal the gloom of our mind by writing, as Antonio says Gratiano speaks, even "an infinite deal of nothing."

You ask me in the next paragraph, if the soul does not feel, at times, a certain greatness or splendour of conception, which baffles our powers of verbal expression. Unquestionably it is often found so with people of elevated intellect. Hence, I apprehend, originates the obscurity, frequently occurring in some of our noblest writers, and in none so frequently as in Shakespeare. Hence the endless work his plays have given to commentators, besides that which was occasioned by false transcript and ignorant punctuation.

Obscurity lowers at times upon the meaning of

great and feeble writers; but, in the first, it is often the result of ideas above the powers of language possessed by the author at the moment those ideas occur; and so find we night in excessive day. In low writers, or moderate ones that would be great, we find them perpetually striving to conceal the triteness or inanity of their conceptions in verbal pomp, and so they strut along into ambiguity or utter darkness.

Amidst countless instances of Shakespeare's perspicuous eloquence, we not unfrequently find him labouring with his thought, and at last the birth proves abortive. Johnson's preface to his edition of the Glorious Creature, unjust to him in so many instances, does not do him injustice when he observes, that "Shakespeare is often entangled with an idea which he cannot express, and will not reject—that he struggles with it a while, and, if it continues stubborn, comprises it in such words as occur, and leaves it to be disentangled by those who have more leisure to bestow upon it.

I worship Shakespeare devoutly as yourself, yet I cannot accede to your opinion that he cultivated all the poetic ground, and left only a barren waste to his successors. Milton was his successor, his warm and generous admirer, as his fine epitaph on the great bard evinces: yet though

Milton took largely from the Greek, the Roman, and Tuscan poets, and even from several of his English predecessors, as Fletcher, Crashaw, and Brown, he took little if any thing from Shakespeare. I acknowledge Shakespeare to have been England's poetic sun; yet not only Milton, but Dryden, Pope, Prior, Young, Thomson, Collins, Gray, Mason, Chatterton, Hayley, Cowper, Crowe, Darwin, and our rising stars Coleridge and Southey, are resplendent poetic stars, whose lights are unborrowed of that sun.

I hear and read much of the exhausted sources of the muses, but I am convinced they are inexhaustible, and will be found so whenever real genius brings its cup to the fountains. Those cups have been plenteously filled in the present period. Since it is demonstrated, that to ring all the possible changes on twenty bells, would employ more years than the world is old, how is it possible, even if genuine poetic talent were frequent as common-sense itself, that the endless varieties of nature and art, of character and incident, should cease to present new combinations, new illustrations, new imagery.

That the bard of Avon is the greatest bard that any age, any country has produced, or ever will produce, I do most firmly believe, and have often thought that I scarcely ever met with a marked

character, of which, in some of its leading features, the prototype may not be found in Shakespeare.

The Creator dispenses intellect in extreme inequality, and with countless shades of difference in degree; and though modern philosophers, maintaining hypotheses against the incessant decisions of experience, assert otherwise, yet He as certainly frames the mind and bodily organs, for the attainment of excellence in some one science or art, which it could not attain in any other.

And it has not unfrequently occurred to my reflections, that, in every science and art, and again in each separate branch of that science and art, He destines, in some only one, in others a very few, to acquire the last limit, or highest summit of its excellence, which human powers can acquire. Thus Newton stands on the extremest bound of astronomic acquirement; Shakespeare in approachless greatness and lustre in dramatic poetry; Homer and Milton in the epic,—for Virgil, graceful, and polished, and skilful as he is, yet loses, in enormous plagiarism from Homer, all just claim to equality with either of them; Gray, in the lyric, though he is much more nearly approached by Collins, Mason, Chatterton, and by Coleridge in his sublime Ode to the Departing Year, than are the other instanced poets on their

eminence. In painting, Michael Angelo, the three Caraccis, and Raphael, seem to have thus excelled their rivals in the historic style; Poussin, Claude, and Salvator in the landscape. While in music, when it marries immortal verse, and then only is it truly sublime, Handel stands approachless as Shakespeare himself in grandeur and variety.

But then I cannot agree that any of these have plucked, root and branch, all the flowers and fruits in their different walks, reducing those who follow them to barren dulness, or gauze-veiled plagiarism.

Painting has certainly made great progress in this kingdom during the present century; so also have the manual arts, lighted on their way by modern philosophy;—and, as to poetry, I perceive, on the whole, no marked degeneracy from the last century in any line, excepting only the serious drama; the degeneracy there, with the single exception of Jephson, is indeed deplorable. In the epic Southey's Joan of Arc approaches, in genius, nearer the Paradise Lost than any other epic attempt in our language.

The feeble efforts of the tragic muse, in this day, I am inclined to impute entirely to the inconsistent fastidiousness of modern criticism, and to the false taste it has generated. He who,

without servile imitation, was to venture, as Jephson did venture, to take Shakespeare's style for his model, would be hooted, as Jephson was hooted, from public credit and just admiration, by the public critics.

Were it possible to produce such plays now as Cymbeline, the Tempest, or As You Like It, what chance would they have of applause from the reviewers, of endurance from a modern audience?—and yet, strange paradox! while a writer is not allowed to assume Shakespeare's daring privileges of style, his mixture of great and mean characters, such as human life produces, and which, therefore, the dramatist should copy;—his mixture of grand and familiar language, his bold and perpetual use of metaphor; his custom of making adjectives into verbs, &c., the modern play is always brought into comparison with Shakespeare's by the reviewers, for the purpose of disgracing it.

I have always perceived this withering injustice, and have therefore never attempted to write a tragedy.

You have, doubtless, observed that Providence, wise. and, on the whole, equal in its gifts to the general mind, supplies in number what it may withhold in degree, as to genius, in most sciences. The poetic writers, contemporary with Spencer,

Shakespeare, and Milton, were not only few in number, but those few as much inferior to the poets of this century, Dryden perhaps excepted, as its best poets are inferior to Shakespeare and Milton. How much greater, as lyric poets, are Collins, Gray, Mason, the boy Chatterton, Hayley, and Coleridge, than Cowley; how much greater, as an epic poet, is young Southey to the maturer Davenant; as satirists, Pope, Dr. Johnson, and Cowper, compared to Donne; in pastoral, Shenstone and Burns, than Gay and Philips; the four last, indeed, though not contemporaries, were of the same century.

In philosophy, if we have not a Newton, who else of *his* day equalled Priestley, Darwin, and Herschel, in natural and scientific discoveries? In her former historians, England finds none so justly her boast as Hume, Robertson, and Gibbon; nor amongst her serious essayists, strength and eloquence, that equal Aikin, Barbauld, and Johnson.

Lo! into what length has my zeal for the just claims of my country in the undiminished genius of her sons, led me! but I think I have been guided by no ignis-fatuus. Adieu!

LETTER XXXI.

MISS PONSONBY.

Lichfield, Jan. 24, 1799.

I HAVE to thank you, dearest ladies, for a very beautiful but too costly present. This ring and seal in one, this Apollo's head and lyre, makes an admirable impression. It is a fine gem, and rich and elegant is the circlet for the finger. As your gift, it possesses value,

> ——————" Gold says, ' is not in me;'
> And, ' not in me,' the diamond."

Mr S. desires me to make his grateful acknowledgment for the elegant testimony he has received of Lady E. Butler and Miss Ponsonby's regard, who increase the happiness of all on whom they smile, and confer distinction wherever they esteem.

Frequent are the periods in which I grieve for the lost tranquillity of your hearts, and in which I deplore the cause. This forcing the scheme of union upon Ireland, against the general inclina-

tion of its people, especially at this dangerous juncture, is a new instance of the daring pride of Mr Pitt. The English may thank themselves for the complicated mischiefs he has brought upon their country. They have not only borne and do bear, but have applauded, and yet applaud, his baffled schemes, and heavy unprecedented oppressions, till they have taught him to think he may coerce the world. He commands a majority in the Irish parliament, and he will say to the sword, Do thou the rest.

When last I had the honour to address you, it was with the fervent and probable hope, that, ere this time, I should have the happiness to congratulate you on the restored tranquillity of your native country; it was then comfortably in train for that blessed event, till this fatal scheme came forward:

> "That bears a thousand dangers on its wing,
> And thousand well-disposed Irish hearts
> Plucks from the cause of England."

My sonnets and odes are gone to press. I wished a pretty engraving for their frontispiece. A design occurred to me, allusive to the first sonnet. I described it to our Lichfield Claude, Glover, and though landscape, not figures, is his study, he has made a sweet drawing from my plan,

if the engraver will but do him equal justice. Imagination, a beautiful female figure, stands lightly on an eminence, partially gilded by a sunbeam, glancing through the clouds of a gloomy horizon, which darken the surrounding scene below. With her hands gracefully lifted, she holds her lamp up to the sunbeam, which enkindles it. The motto you will find underdrawn in the lines which suggested my design:

——— ——" Lo! with alter'd brows
Lowers the false world, and the fine spirit grieves,
No more Hope's day-spring tints with light and bloom
The darkening scene. Then to ourselves we say,
Come, bright Imagination come, relume
Thy orient lamp!"

Glover is a man of most comprehensive genius. His first attempt at portrait, and he has yet made only two, is a striking and pleasing likeness of our young and lovely Mr Lister, whose literary fame is rising fast, and I conceive his talents plumed for a very lofty flight; but I have not yet dismissed Mr Glover, whose taste is not less awakened to the beauties of the pen, than his hand is competent to the powers of the pencil. A gentle and amiable temper has removed from his voice, and from his manners, every vestige of that rusticity

which his obscure birth and unlettered education might teach us to expect. He has engaged to instruct a young married pair of our city in drawing, gratis, on condition that the gentleman teaches him Italian. Such lettered ambition in a life so busy, and with the care of providing for a wife and seven children, is as laudable as it is rare.

Early in December I lost, in the prime of his life, a valued friend and nineteen years correspondent. Yes, the humane, the lettered David Samwell, is no more. He was fellow-voyager of the brave Cook, and stood high in his esteem. My elegy on him procured me Mr Samwell's friendship. He was born amid your vales, and has been long the patron of Cambrian poesy in its native tongue, and, I am told, wrote it finely himself.

And Wales has yet more recently lost a very pleasant acquaintance of Mr Saville's and mine. Poor Watkin Hayman, the witty and the harmonious, whose songs

> " So oft made vocal Cambria's passing gales."

Mr Saville sighs and says, " So there is one pleasure the less for us in Wales." Both these gentlemen died in apparently perfect health, by apoplexy.

Adieu! adieu! May the new dangers which threaten Ireland, and, with it, your future peace, be averted!

LETTER XXXII.

COLIN MACKENZIE, Esq. of Edinburgh.

Lichfield, Feb. 3, 1799.

SIR,—I am extremely grateful for the bounteous and valuable present you have sent me*; and I eagerly hasten to say, that I am charmed with your friend's poems. Two years since, a friend of mine met with the William and Helen at the cottage of the celebrated recluses of Langollen Vale. He reads finely, and he was desired to read it in their circle. It was in manuscript, and he understood unpublished; but that was a mistake. Thus,

* It consisted of various poems by Walter Scott, Esq. a Scotish barrister. Two paraphrases from the German Burger, published in 1796; Leonora, under the title of William and Helen; and the Chace; a third in manuscript, from Burger, not yet published.—The Triumph of Constancy, and an original poem, which has not at present past the press, entitled Glenfinlas. 1799.—*S.*

he considered as an indulgence that he obtained permission to make extracts from William and Helen, of those parts in which the poem differs from the German, by circumstances and pictures that increase the sublime horrors of the story. He knew how high Spencer's Leonora stood in my estimation; but he also knew my predilection for that species of translation which scruples not to throw in new matter, congenial to the subject and style, and capable of heightening their interest or their imagery. On perusing those extracts, I agreed with my friend, that the new features in this equestrian ghost, are more grandly horrid than any in the original.

Thus will it almost invariably be when poets, not versifiers, translate. So Dryden, so Pope translated; and it is thus, and only thus, that translations may possess the spirit of original composition. Let pedantry rattle its chains at them till it is tired, true taste will applaud the poet, who, differing from his original, soars above him. The translator, whose fancy has not power to rise above the water-mark of literality, what is he, compared to him who floats away on the spring-tides of the subject, with every sail of his imagination unfurled.

The Chace, from Burger, has grand features, though not, on the whole, perhaps, by any means

equal to your friend's William and Helen. A fine contrast is formed by the two knights, under whose allegoric representation is meant Cruelty and Mercy.

Dryden's Theodore and Honoria is the source of this, and perhaps of all the retributory spectres, with which, of late, the press has teemed,—but the Chace is of infinitely juster moral than Dryden's poem. The lady's fault, whose terrible fate was shewn to the warned Honoria, seems to have been only a too proudly expressed disdain of a lover she did not like. Surely every woman may be allowed her negative! That is a cause finely pleaded in Don Quixotte, by Marcella, when she bends from a rock, looking down on the body of her lover, who had obstinately died because she could not love him. It would be hard if one was to have one's bowels torn out once a-week, for ever and ay, by blood-hounds, for bridling coldly at an unpleasant and importunate suitor.

Earl Walter's crime deserved the punishment it met. How he stands blasted in the wood alone, amid the terrible silence which succeeds to the loud and remorseless clamour of his vanished hunters and dogs! Whatever Burger may do, I am certain Mr Scott writes finely.

The Triumph of Constancy has sweet and novel traits, given by your friend with the freedom

and the fire of genius;—but there is something ludicrous in the canine consolation for the perfidy of a charming woman. It piques the pride of the ladies not a little.

And now, like music, sweetest in its close, Mr Scott's original poem comes full upon my acknowledgment. It enchants me. Its softer features vie with the loveliest passages in Ossian, and its terrible graces with those of the German muse. The day and my scanty leisure would fail me, were I to attempt pointing out all the beauties of Glenfinlas, they are so thickly sown.

Your friend preserves that fine characteristic of the poetry of his country, the local stamp on the scenery. Ascertained locality gives an interest to scenic description, which can never belong to a mere mountain, a valley, wood, or stream which may be anywhere, or nowhere. Dr Blair says of Ossian—It is the hill of Cromla; the blue waves of Ullin; the storms of the sea of Malmor; the reeds of the lake of Lego. So, in Mr Scott's poem, it is the dell of Glenfinlas, the sullen brook Moneira; the bog of Lulan; the rocks of Colinsay.

The grand poetic excellencies of Glenfinlas shake verbal objections to air, or I would observe, that, in the tenth verse, Glenfinlas Glen grates the ear by inharmonious alliteration, and

fatigues it by the too near repetition of the same syllable. It might be altered easily. There are a few other little neglects of the same sort; but, to readers of sensibility, they are lost in the poetic blaze of the poem. The thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth stanzas, are original description, and beautiful in the very first degree.

I ought to have observed, on my earliest mention of this poem, that it makes fortunate use of the Highland superstition, second-sight.

The picture drawn by Lord Ronald, and afterwards by the huntress of the then stern and melancholy seer, when he was gay and enamoured, forms another fine contrast. The thirty-first verse is supremely fine. The abrupt departure of Lord Ronald, in contempt of the warning, is striking,—

"And call'd his dogs and gay withdrew."

The return of the dogs, their howl of lament and crouching position, is an exquisite picture. I think I have seen something like it in Ossian, but the symptoms of their change from sorrow to terror, are original description, and we shudder beneath it; and the self-awakened harp!—how it thrills us!

The half-opened door, and stealing-tip-toe entrance of the seeming beauteous huntress, has a

sweet effect. She is the most natural beauty that poetry has painted, with her chilled complexion and drenched garments. By the simple action of bending to wring her wet hair over the embers, she is brought distinctly to the eye. Her transformation from a fair huntress to a fiend of witchcraft, on the temptation being resisted, is grandly sublime—and so is the remainder of the poem, till the three last stanzas, which are sweetly pathetic.

Three times has the name of Scott adorned the poetic annals of England, since the year 1757. At that period, a Mr Scott of Amwell published four beautiful elegies on the four seasons;—of moral elegies they stand next in merit to Gray's Country Churchyard. Another Scott published a poem, much admired on its first appearance, entitled, The Day of Judgment; and also a monody on the death of his wife, that passed not away without its fame. I confess, however, that neither of them impressed or became dear to me like the writings of his namesake; they enrich the supplementary volumes to Dodsley's Collection. This verse is from the earlier Scott's poetry:

"O, human life, how mutable, how vain!
How thy wide sorrows circumscribe thy joy!
A sunny island in a stormy main!
A speck of azure in a cloudy sky!"

The powers of this third Scott rise a bolder flight than those of his first namesake, and wholly eclipse those of his second.

I remain, Sir, &c.

LETTER XXXIII.

REV. T. S WHALLEY.

Lichfield, March 7, 1799.

I FIND your tragedy is announced for speedy representation. It would give me great pleasure to see it performed before an audience sensible of its merit, and liberal of applause; but my health and strength are too unequal to the hurries of London, for me to dare encountering them. My next pleasure would be to learn its success, and quietly to explore its pages. Even of that pleasure I fear the enjoyment is remote. I have every trust in your powers; but the present age is an Egyptian taskmaster to the tragic dramatist. It calls for Shakespearean viands, yet will not allow the use of those poetic ingredients which composed them. Thus plays are produced, of which may be said what Madam Sevigné has recorded of her

son's disposition and talents, that they had made him completely an orange gourd soused in snow: by which I understand, that, with pretensions to enthusiasm and glow, he was, in reality, like that apparently flaming plant, watery and cold by nature. Of this coldness, generated by the restraints and the fastidiousness of modern taste and periodical public criticism, they are each unjust enough to complain, and to reproach the author for the productions of their own ice-house.

This consciousness has always repressed in my mind every idea of writing tragedy; but if I were obliged to assume the buskin, I would make a large dramatis personæ, people the stage well; endeavour to inspirit the representation by complicated business, and by numerous and contrasted characters. I would disdain to assume the fetters of the unities as to time and place, invented with a design to create a deception, which never did, never will, never can exist, for a single moment, in a rational mind, as Johnson has finely demonstrated in his preface to Shakespeare. It is by other means than the insane belief that the actors are really Cæsar and Antony, and the stage Rome, or Pharsalia, that the drama interests and affects. The mind readily accommodates itself to change of place, be the distance ever so wide; and as to time, if it extends beyond that of the re-

presentation, an elapse must be supposed; and the elapse of years is as easily supposed as of weeks, or even of a single day or night. A boundless latitude, as to time, enables the author to exhibit the persons of his drama in various and contrasted situations.

In Shakespeare, we find the dramatic felicity which results from such emancipation—and, therefore I would emulate the freedom he asserted.

While I would avoid long declamation, my style should be impassioned, and consequently metaphoric, for metaphor is the natural language of a raised imagination and agitated heart.

Thus would I attempt the Shakespearean characteristics rather than those of the Grecian, the French, or the modern English drama. Therefore, whatever my audience might do as to groaning, hissing, and cat-calling, at least they should not sleep. I verily believe, had Richard III., Cymbeline, Hamlet, or any other of Shakespeare's most admired plays been written and presented now, they would be hissed, groaned, and cat-called: so completely has modern criticism vitiated and depraved the taste and feelings of the age. It is no wonder that the tragic muse has sunk—she is not permitted to soar; but, at every hazard,

and amidst every opposition, she should imp her eagle wings. Life is busy, eventful, and many-coloured: the stage should be the world's epitome.

LETTER XXXIV.

Miss Ponsonby.

Lichfield, April 8, 1799.

That your and Lady Eleanor's kind attentive cares have restored the health of your humble friend and follower of your fortunes, I congratulate you, my dearest Madam*. Concerning your own and mutual health, the kind letter, which I have now the honour to acknowledge, makes no mention. I therefore flatter myself it is unimpaired.

* The female servant who, when these ladies left their splendid connections in Ireland, twenty years ago, to seek a lettered retirement in Wales, pined a few months for their absence, and then set out to search for them in England, without any clue to direct her pursuit, since, to avoid solicitations to return, they had kept the scene of their retreat a secret even from their nearest relations and friends.—*S.*

Would to Heaven I could entertain for your peace as dear a certainty * !—but let me forbear to touch the jarring string, which you shun to vibrate;—nor will I descant on my own increasing weakness from the augmenting tyranny of rheumatic disease.

Correcting every proof-sheet of my emerging volume, has been a task at once engrossing and irksome. Yet was it not repented even in the most oppressive moments of lassitude. The proper or improper position even of commas and semicolons, is momentous to perspicuity. We cannot hope from the demons of the press a sedulous attention to them, and revisers are very prone to conceive a meaning in passages foreign from the author's conception, and hence to alter the punctuation so as to favour their own mistaken idea. There is no guarding against that danger, but by the author correcting the press himself. It is true his eye, conscious of what should be, is apt to overlook what is. This propensity has probably left several erroneous verbalisms in myself-revised sheets; but worse mischief had probably ensued from delegating that trust, even though the person so employed were a man of sense, and a scholar.

* On account of the present dreadful situation of their native Ireland.—*S.*

The desire which you say your numerous correspondents express to see my muse re-entered on the paths of publicity, is highly flattering, thorny as those paths are apt to prove. Considering that desire as sincere, it gratifies my hope of her welcome reception in the world; and, in the modester idea, that such avowed impatience is merely the wish of saying what they know will please those whom every person of taste desires to please, their courtierism must result from a belief thrice precious to my heart;—and thus, either way, am I gratified.

A friend of Mr Roscoe's lately sent me that gentleman's translation, in verse, of an ancient Italian poem, La Balia*, by Tansillio. By making immense boasts, in the preface, of the poetic merit of his original, Mr Roscoe made himself responsible for a very charming poem in an English dress. Either he has been fascinated by the grandeur and sweetness of the Italian language, into a very overweening appreciation of the merit of La Balia, or he has suffered the charms and graces, of which he boasts, to vanish from beneath his pen in their translation. It is, in truth, a dry-nurse in his versification, destitute of imagery, barren of metaphor, and nearly naked as to allu-

* The Nurse.—S.

sion. In short, we find scarce any of the poetic essentials in this work; the versification is flat and monotonous; nor does the long and heavy composition contain, in my opinion, twenty lines which deserve to be called poetry. Many passages are obscure through grammatic inaccuracy.

The duty enjoined by this poem is, without doubt, important, and, in the higher classes of life, infamously sacrificed to unjustifiable excuses; —but, by ridiculous exaggeration of the evils resulting from its neglect, the poet disarms the force of his own admonitions. The unnatural practice of omitting it through idleness, the love of amusement, or personal vanity, is sufficiently reprehensible, without calling in the aid of bugbear. The injunctions to perform it are, in this composition, positive, without making any exceptions from circumstances which render a large number of mothers unfit for this delightful office, as insanity or scrofula in their families, or a pulmonary or scorbutic taint in their own constitution. Also, with no more exceptions, it pronounces the hired wet-nurse an inevitable fiend, whether in or out of the house of her employer; and absurdly asserts that, not only bodily diseases are imbibed by the infant from her, but every grovelling and vicious propensity, as if ignorance and wickedness could be conveyed by aliment.

Where the maternal nutriment is ineligible, no mention is made of cow's milk as a substitute. Experience continually proves that a healthy infant may be so fed, without danger of inoculated malady.

With all the sins of omission against poetry, and all of commission against good sense, with which this translation abounds, I observed to Mr Saville and cousin White, when we read it together, that the reviewers would applaud it. They exclaimed, "Impossible! you are too hard upon reviewers." But, lo! my prophecy is accomplished. I knew that the celebrity which Lorenzo de Medicis has obtained, would make them conclude every production must be good which came from the pen of its author. I believed they were not aware that it is one thing to be a good prose-writer, an industrious linguist, and historian, and even a good classic scholar, and another to be a good poet. From specimens, which I had seen in former years, of Mr Roscoe's verse-writing, the defects of this translation were no great surprise to me. His powers, in that art, are no above mediocrity;—but the suffrages of the reviewers will give this poem present sale; and then, like Glover's Leonidas, it will sink to rise no more. The prefixed sonnet to Mrs Roscoe is pretty—worth more, short as it is, than the old

course. If she falls in your or Lady Eleanor's way, you will tell me if the original supports, in any degree, the encomiums of the translator's preface, since it is printed, page by page, with the English.

Do you not admire the poetic sublimity of Coleridge's Ode to the Departed Year, however you may be shocked, as I am shocked, by the presumptuous and unpatriotic excess of condemnation which it pours forth on this country, as if England were the pest and execration of the whole world! It calls us the boody island. Great, I must confess, has its national guilt appeared to me within the past ten years; yet, I hope, it is not so dark, so extreme, so accursed of God and man, as this ode asserts; but, as poetry, I scarce know any thing superior to the following passage:

"Departed Year! 'twas on no mortal shore
My soul beheld thy vision. Where alone,
Voiceless and stern, before the cloudy throne
Ay Memory sits; there, garmented with gore,
With many an unimaginable groan,
Thou storiest thy sad hours. Silence ensued,
Deep silence, through th' etherial multitude,
Whose clustering locks with snow-white glories shone.
Then, his eyes wild ardours glancing,
From the choired host advancing,

"The Spirit of the Earth made reverence meet,
And stood up beautiful before the cloudy seat."

I have lent the book, and, therefore, quoting from recollection, may possibly be inaccurate in one or two words; but what a sublime image is that of Memory, and I believe it perfectly original; nor less original, less exquisite is that of the Spirit of the Earth. Indistinctness in description is, on certain rare occasions, a poetic excellence, where the object mentioned is of too transcendent splendour to be conceived with precision, either by the poet or his reader. Such is the Spirit of the Earth in this ode: his glory is ineffable,—and the words *stood up beautiful*, renouncing every aim at determinate picture, leave the imagination of the reader, if he has imagination, thrilled with a consciousness of superhuman perfection. Sublimity, in the highest possible degree, thus results from indistinctness in Milton's portrait of Death when he encounters Satan; and infinite poetic beauty, from the same source, when Ossian says: "Fair as the spirit of the hill, when it glides in a sunbeam at noon, over the silence of Morven."

I remain, dearest Madam, &c.

LETTER XXXV.

REV. T. S. WHALLEY.

April 16, 1799.

THE first fateful night of your tragedy is at hand. I shall inquire after its reception with agitated solicitude. My pen has endeavoured to secure the attendance, interest, and support of all my London correspondents on this occasion.—You have never told me even its title; but I observed to them that a new tragedy, to be presented in the course of this week, and through whose scenes Mrs Siddons was pledged to exert her powers and her graces, must be yours; and that, from your long mutual friendship, they would be exerted con amore.

I have seldom experienced a literary longing of so much impatience as to see your play. If it has the interest, pathos, and spirit of your domestic epic, the fascinating Edwy and Edilda, I shall love it, even if you have put it into the strictest fetters of the unities. A weak defence of them accidentally came in my way, since I last wrote to you upon the subject. It was written, some

twelve years since, by the late Mr Hodson, fellow of one of the Cambridge colleges, and author of the tragedy Zoraida, a man of considerable talents and scholastic reputation. He pronounces that the limits, as to time, ought not to exceed twenty-four hours; but, if they exceed the time of the performance at all, limiting restraint is useless, is pernicious. Useless, because it is impossible to lose the consciousness that the play is a representation, not a reality. Pernicious, because it is seldom, indeed, that such a small portion of existence can supply events, which place the persons of the drama in those varied and contrasting situations, which shew the characters in different points of view, as acting under the influence of dissimilar circumstances and passions.

Mr Hodson had studied Shakespeare so little as to observe that, finely as he has written, "his plays would have possessed still greater superiority had he observed the rules of Aristotle."

All who feel Shakespeare's excellence, and examine the causes of his infinitely surpassing powers, respecting all other dramatic writers, Greek, Roman, French, German, and English, in the representation of life, of the passions, and manners, will feel that his disdain of those rules is not an error to be pardoned on the score of his poetic and characteristic recompenses, but one powerful-

ly operative means by which he acquired his confessed transcendence. Could he have been engaged to have new-modelled his Macbeth in an approach to the restraints of the unities, as to time and place, observe what it must have lost;—the heath-scene; the banquet-scene; the cave-scene; the castle-scene, and its siege,—with all their animating changes, all the characteristic varieties, all the poetic sublimities resulting from situations of such inspiriting difference!—all lopt and lost; while, for the business of one evening, and even for an elapse of twenty-four hours, what superfluous speeches, what spun-out declamation, must have been made to have dragged the murder of Duncan through five acts? Then the admirable moral sacrificed, which results from the gradual progression of vice in the character of Macbeth;—a mind, once great and noble, proceeding to the last excesses of superfluous cruelty. That could not naturally happen in the course of twenty-four hours.

Who can ponder these things, and, if they write plays, not wish to avail themselves of an example so pregnant with dramatic advantages! Besides, it is known that Aristotle formed his rules upon the preceding examples of the Greek poets. Let modern critics do the same; and, since we have

an infinitely greater dramatic writer than Menander, Sophocles, Eschylus, or Euripides, boldly assert that truth demonstrated by the effect of his plays, that all limits, as to time or place, are not only superfluous, but inimical to the theatric representation of human life, character, and manners.

You say you would not vainly attempt to imitate Shakespeare. Servile imitation is disgraceful; but there is neither servility nor vanity in observing and in using the means by which great writers attain their purposes. Why should not the poet, as well as the painter, work after the best models?

I wonder to hear you expressing contempt for translations, since you are conscious that Dryden's finest poems, the ode excepted, are translations from Boccace and Chaucer; that Shakespeare did not disdain to adopt, not only the stories, but the thoughts and images which he found in the ballads and novels from whence he formed his plays; that, in his historic dramas, he took much from Plutarch and our own old historians.

Mr T. Warton has shewn us the outlines of the Paradise Lost in an Italian play; and of Comus, L'Allegro, and Il Penseroso, in the works of poets who preceded Milton half a century.

If these circumstances had been considered, you would not have said that little credit can arise from translations, or from working upon the crude materials of others. Oh! how much credit has resulted to *his* fame, who first made the Iliad an English poem of exquisite interest and beauty!—Adieu!

LETTER XXXVI.

F. N. C. MUNDY, ESQ.

Lichfield, April 30, 1799.

PERMIT me to express my very flattered sense of the honour conferred on my late publication by your charming sonnet*. It is truly Miltonic.

* *On Miss* SEWARD'S *Sonnets, with particular allusion to her Twenty-first and Twenty-second.*

CRITIC, hast thou fastidiously proclaim'd,
Misjudging from such humble verse as mine,
The lyre's lost energy, the sad decline
Of genius in this island, early nam'd

Self out of the question, had a superior muse been its object, I should admire it as poetry; yet permit me to enter my protest against the second line. It is unworthy the author of one of the most beautiful local poems in our language, not to feel the high poetic ground on which he stands. Leave to poetasters the humility which well becomes their meagre pretensions.

I have always remonstrated with Mr Hayley against that sort of self-injustice. In some verses of invitation, which he once sent to Gibbon, and afterwards injudiciously published in his Miscellany, he compares the Roman historian to the eagle, and himself to the sparrow, who would chirp his welcome to the imperial bird. Gibbon, who was perhaps little conversant with poetry, and therefore unable to perceive that Mr Hayley had, at least, an equal claim with himself to the

In classic heraldry, and foremost fam'd?
From Greece, from Latium, came th' impatient Nine,
Here to revive their laurels, and entwine
Their shoots; rewards of Envy only blam'd.——
And here they still rejoice; here still abides
Imagination in her mountains strong;
While Harmony beneath her stream divides.
And thou shalt blush, vain critic, for thy wrong
Tasting these sweets which the Queen Muse provides,
With rarest elegance of sex and song.

palm of genius, took the unjust comparison and hyperbolic compliment very coolly; and, in one of his published letters, says, respecting his visit to Eartham, "The sparrow chirped very prettily to me amid his groves." For having stooped to the false humility of self-degradation, Mr Hayley deserved the inevitable jar that sentence must give to his feelings. It was an impertinence which he had drawn upon himself.

O! bard of Needwood, remember Milton's noble self-assertion, in his eighth Sonnet—remember also that Pope calls his own writings,

> "The deathless satire, the immortal song."

Surely it is one thing to be vain, and another to assert our just claims. I always enjoy hearing a man of genius telling the undervaluing blockheads, that he feels the extent of his own powers:

> ——"To see him weigh them with himself,
> Then value;—oft-times nothing profits more
> Than self-esteem, grounded on just and right."

Suffer me to apply to you, on the subject of disavowed genius, the following lines, which were subjoined to a gratifying epigram on my Hora-

tian Paraphrases, by our learned and venerable Canon, Mr Inge of this place.

> " Sume superbiam
> Quæsitam meritis; et mihi Delphica
> Lauro cinge volens, Melpomene comam."

I see you make Imagination masculine. To be sure the partial distribution of its gifts to the male sex, might induce us to suppose it of the brotherhood; but I have always seen genius manified, and imagination, or fancy, womanized. I hope you pardon word coining. Indeed, according to Richardson, it should be female, on the very account of that partial distribution. His Lovelace, in the Clarissa, says,—" Women make better monarchs than men," glancing at the superiority of Elizabeth's government to that of the five kings who preceded her from our fifth Henry, and to that of her four Stuart successors; also at the more temperate, wiser, and happier reign of Anne, compared to the sway of her four ancestors. For the superiority he thus accounts: " It is from the power each sex possesses over the mind of the other, that a nation has best chance for happiness under a queen, since then they are governed by men, while under kings they are governed by women."

You see the compliment of superior wisdom rests, at last, with you lords of the creation.

I have the honour to remain, &c.

LETTER XXXVII.

F. N. C. MUNDY, ESQ.

Lichfield, May 6, 1799.

YOUR mind, then, is still sore from the tasteless reception, given by the reviewers of that period, to the youthful effusions of your poetic fancy. You tell me that you still cannot help feeling, as an injury, the solicitations you received from the late illustrious Thomas Warton and his brother, to publish them. And is not the warm applause of such men as Thomas Warton and his brother, an host of defence in poetic appreciation, that crushes to nothing the condemnation of all the reviewers that ever talked malignant nonsense about verse, since first anonymous criticism became a trade? Ought one of the most beautiful local poems in our language for ever to be detained within the limits of a partial publication, a private

press, because they had condemned what the Wartons had admired?

Your Elegies to Laura, in that volume of your causeless repentance, are as natural and beautiful as the Love Elegies of Hammond, which are less original, borrowing, as they do, so largely from Tibullus.

When I was at Buxton with my dear Honora Sneyd, in the summer 1769, those elegies were first introduced to me and to her, before whose young eyes, for she was then only eighteen, no poetic grace, or defect, passed unnoticed. The present Dr Falconer of Bath was of our party. He had a strong mind, and was then an enthusiast in the charms of beautiful verse. He repeated, by heart, not detached parts, but the whole of your Elegies to Laura, then recently published. They received no advantage from his recitation, which was not harmonious; yet they charmed us. They must have possessed no common share of poetic beauty to induce a man of taste and learning to commit them to memory entire.

Recollect that the two noblest lyric odes the world has produced, Gray's Bard, and his Eolian Lyre, were abused, on their first appearance, by all the hireling periodical critics of that period, as turgid and obscure; that the elegant Lloyd

and nervous Churchill, were employed in writing burlesque parodies upon them, which were read, enjoyed, and admired by the multitude, just as the witty Loves of the Triangles are at present.

Can you take up a review, or magazine, without meeting criticism on poetry which outrages every thing like taste, feeling, or even common-sense? One lies before me at this moment. It is the New London Review for last April, the present year. I am tempted to transcribe from it the following curious sentences.

"We have little blank verse in our language which delights the ear of taste, if we except the Handel-harmonies of Milton, and that delicious music in some of Shakespeare's lines, which equally enchant us with the sweetness and beauty of the thought. The golden lines of Rowe are not to be forgotten as models of that kind of verse which approaches the language of conversation, and is adapted to the freedom and expression of dramatic and descriptive poetry. Akenside is perhaps an echo, but an exquisite echo, of the tones of Milton. Armstrong exhibits a versification condensed, terse, and didactic; but such blank verse as Thomson's has nothing of poetry but its images, its descriptions, and its expressions; it is not musical."

Now, you are perfectly aware that the abun-

dance and variety of our fine blank verse, is the first and grandest boast of English poetry;—no two species of which demands a more different style than the dramatic and the descriptive, which this critic so absurdly couples. Akenside is a fine writer; but so far from being an echo of Milton, that no measures of blank verse can be more dissimilar. Then what a *but* about Thomson!!! It is like the Lincolnshire fen-man, who, when Mr Sneyd asked him how he liked the country about Wolesley Bridge, said, "Not at all; here is nothing but hills, and dales, and rocks, and rivers, and woods."

Then what a Midas-assertion, that Thomson has no music in his numbers! Occasional harshness there must be in so long a composition as the Seasons, but the numbers are varied and harmonious even to luxury. It is no wonder than an ear and judgment, so dull as to be insensible of their mingled grandeur and sweetness, should forget the blank verse of Otway, of Young, of Mason, of Cowper, of Crowe, and of Jephson.

I did not recollect that Pope had ever called his muse names. In the instance you have quoted, he was as ungrateful as a certain friend of mine, who believed the reviewers rather than Thomas Warton. In respect to your question. "Can there be too much real or any affected humility

in speaking of my own verses, when I think of the great poets this nation has produced?" I reply, —that in the poetic house there are many mansions—in the poetic heaven many orbits. Jupiter and Venus are not so bright as the sun, yet there is no justice in saying they are not brighter than farthing candles;—and would you blot them from the hemisphere?—I remain, &c.

LETTER XXXVIII.

MISS PONSONBY.

Lichfield, May 21, 1799.

AMIDST all that carries sweetness to my heart in the letter with which you have lately honoured me, I sigh to perceive its first page shadowed over with the gloom of regret. Justly do you observe, dearest Madam, consanguinity and friendship are less often than they ought, synonymous terms. When they prove so, separation is very grievous, even though local distance had long prevented the frequency of personal intercourse. The impossibility of its renewal, the *never, never more!* is an afflicting consciousness.

I thank heaven, yourself, and Lady Eleanor, possess in the sense, hourly, ocular, and audible, of each other's existence, a healing balm for every wound which the resistless dart can inflict on objects of secondary dearness.

A little time will now put me in possession of the Plays on the Passions. I had rather read a new work before I purchase it; but there is no borrowing these dramas here; yet I see they have interested my charming friends of the Cambrian vale, and have therefore every confidence that they will interest me. My literary friend and correspondent, Mrs Jackson, whose taste is highly just and discriminating, also speaks of them in a style which creates considerable predilection.

After giving her reasons for preferring Count Basil to the general favourite, Count de Montford, she says: "Before their author was known, I observed so much of the power and defects of Mrs Radcliffe's compositions in these dramas, as to believe them hers; and I hear she owns them. Mrs Radcliffe, in whatever she writes, attentive solely to the end, is not sufficiently attentive to observe probability and unity of character in the means she uses to attain it. She bends her plan, or, if it will not bend, she breaks it to her catastrophe, instead of making the catastrophe grow out of the preceding events. Still she always

takes strong hold of her reader's feelings; and effects her purpose boldly, if not regularly. Her descriptive talent, used to satiety in her novels, is here employed with more temperance, and consequently to better purpose."

In this critique, dear Miss Ponsonby, you will perceive the strength of my excellent Mrs Jackson's understanding, and the discrimination of her judgment.

What a heterogeneous compound is the Oberon, of sportive fancy and grotesque humour! of occasional sublimity, and continually occurring vulgarness of expression and idiom! It is the wildest production of the wild German school, which so industriously seeks to lead us back to our nurseries; their ghosts, their fiends, and their fairies. The numbers in the translation want easy flow, and harmonic roundness.

Truly Jack the Piper is come to great honour to have his Tarantula means of punishment adopted, not only in Caliph Vathec, that witty rival of Voltaire's tales, but in this allegoric epic, which aspires to emulate Spencer.

In two reviews, which lately fell in my way, I saw unqualified praise lavished upon the morality of this motely Oberon.—Curious is the encomium. From its sensual voluptuousness of description, I declare I scarcely know the book I

would not sooner put into the hands of ingenuous youth. Lewis's Monk, so mercilessly abused for imputed immorality in its luxuriance, is almost an icicle in the comparison. The descriptions which are of that species in Oberon, we find more frequent, more highly coloured, more discriminate than in the Monk, or than any which can be found in Rousseau's Eloisa. Ah! with how much more justice may the censure Voltaire passed upon that novel be applied to Oberon! "Its author is an empiric, who poisons our souls for the glory of curing them, and the poison will work violently on the passions, and the antidote will operate only on the understanding." In Oberon the outline, the poetic justice of the punishment is moral, but the interior parts abound with the most lavish fuel to refined sensuality; the only sensuality which can be dangerous to amiable young people.

It was a strange fancy to make the exordium utterly unintelligible till after we have read the whole. Instead of preparing us for the poem, the poem must prepare us for the exordium.

Surely the translator wants taste, so totally to exclude every thing like, what is called by painters, *keeping* in the style. Florid and elevated language, perpetually interspersed with such words and phrases as—old boozer—safe and sound—

chat—spilled tears—popt out the secret—fished out the cause—noodle, &c. Then the perpetual recurrence of the word *wink*, is beyond measure disgusting. Why did he not, on serious occasions, substitute the word *glance*, which had occupied the same space in the verse? When we read of Eternal Providence accomplishing its designs in a *wink*, we turn from the low phrase with more than disgust. Nay, on lesser occasions, when the lovely luxurious Almaransis *winks* her attendants away, the miserable word breaks, in my imagination, all the magic of her graces. We endure to see old Sherasmin nodding and winking, but who, that is elegant, ever winked and blinked in the presence of him to whom she wished to appear enchanting, or even decently well-bred.

However, after all the childish extravagance of the plan, and all the motley infelicities of the translator's style, all the cramp of the numbers, I confess Oberon a work of very considerable genius; that it amused and interested me extremely; and that five times the sum it cost should not induce me (adopting its own language) to suffer any *old boozer* to carry it off, *in a wink*, for ever from my book-shelves; and for my young friends, "I hold it very stuff of the conscience" not even to lend it them.

I am beyond measure gratified by all which the dear letter before me says in honour of my late volume. Whatever may prove its reception from the world, and its consequent circulation, if the hireling critics should, by their censures, sink it into present neglect, I cannot therefore repent having published my Sonnets and Horatian Paraphrases, since they have obtained such warm praise from my lettered friends, and since they would not so well have escaped from press-errors beneath the eye of a posthumous editor. If I do not extremely flatter myself, the sonnets possess an inherent bouyancy, which give them the power of emerging in future. That expectation has been often ridiculed as the forlorn hope of the poet; but Spenser, Milton, Otway, Collins, and Chatterton, are instances that it is not always found vain.

Yourself and Lady Eleanor are no strangers to the new poetic star of the Caledonian sphere; but, nourishing, as I do, the pleasing hope of being enabled to pass a few days beneath your roof, in the autumn of this yet wintry year, I almost hope his last and yet unpublished poems, Glenfinlas and the Eve of St John, may not previously meet your eye; that I may have the delight of reading them to you, and observing the lively interest they will excite, and the glowing

praise with which they will be honoured. It is my great happiness to be exempt from the frequent torment of authors, literary envy, though perhaps there is little virtue in exemption so constitutional; but it renders my poetic pleasures wholly unembittered from that source. From a very different one they are often allayed, since I cannot read or hear the beautiful compositions, bold, original, and sublime, which have poured in upon this torpid age, from such various authors, insolently criticized, and unjustly depreciated, without feelings of very painful indignation.

Our little city, in its late contested election, has had a taste of the diabolic mischiefs of awakened strife. It assailed reputation by anonymous libels, and it produced riots which hazarded complicated murders. Though I took no active interest, and, neither by tongue or pen, said one bitter word against any of the party opposite to that which had my calm good wishes, yet, because a certain vilely abusive song upon one of its agents was tolerably written, it was imputed to me. I would as soon have robbed or killed the person it libelled, as have written or encouraged the publication of those verses. I never saw nor heard of them till they had been several days printed, and when they

were read to me, expressed the sincerest indignation against the composition and its unknown author; yet the improbable suspicion produced a most injurious effort of dark-spirited malice and revenge. There can be no doubt the contriver would have murdered me if he durst for the laws. Instances of such industrious villainy, the bitter fruits of a contention, in which personal spite and fury is at once wickedness and idiotism, should teach us the injustice of national reflections;—should shake to air our proud vaunt that Englishmen would, amid the flames of civil war, be less cruel than Frenchmen, or than the Irish.

I am tempted to insert a little impromptu of mine, which arose from my having observed, that Pope had ill-defined the subtle essence of wit in the following couplet:

> "True wit is nature to advantage dress'd,
> What oft was thought, but ne'er so well express'd;"

since new ideas, or rather new combinations of ideas, are vital to its existence. His dogma applies better to eloquence. This is my attempt on the subject:

> "Wit springs from images in contact brought,
> Till then ne'er coupled, or in fact, or thought;

Yet, seen together, people laugh and wonder,
How things so like, so long were kept asunder."

I have the honour to remain, &c.

LETTER XXXIX.

JOSEPH SYKES, Esq. of West-Ella, Yorkshire.

Lichfield, May 28, 1799.

I JOY to perceive, in the kind letter before me, those free and steady characters, which bespeak an unfailing frame; those sensibilities which seventy-eight years have nothing chilled, and an animated clearness of style demonstrating that the intellectual torch wavers not, neither dims in its earthly socket. It was impossible to hope that you should not have irksomely felt the rigours of our late Siberian winter, and its long long reign. Our spring, which has deserted her season, and withheld her hours of promise, deserves equal reproach with that of 1783, which my fifty-fifth sonnet upbraids for the same crime. It glads me that the centennial group have interested so warmly my oldest friend now existing; the pater-

nal friend of my youth. The sonnet is an order of verse, favourable above most others to the effusions of the heart. It enables the poet to arrest fleeting impressions, and to preserve them in their first vivid glow; impressions which else would probably vanish, or if laid by for future use in the memory, would grow faint and cold in the comparison, ere they could be enwoven with other matter, and in a longer work.

Your fidelity to your Horatian promise*, delights me almost as much in the contemplation, as those successful efforts of grateful zeal, which procured ease and affluence to a learned and worthy man.

Repeatedly, since I received your last letter, have I imagined the mutual happiness of that interview, when unexpectedly calling upon you some years after you were established as a British merchant, he found you in the act of performing your votive classic duty. Nor know I which most to admire, the master who enjoined the task,

* The ingenious preceptor of this excellent man's school-days enjoined him, on their separation, to promise that he would read an ode of Horace every day, during the ensuing twenty years. Mr Sykes of West-Ella, is second son to a Sir Christopher Sykes, ancestor to the present Sir Christopher. He has been a prosperous and liberal merchant, beloved and respected by his large family, and by all who knew him.—S.

which was to preserve your literary acquirements, and poetic taste, or the fidelity of the pupil, who suffered not the pressing claims of an extensive commerce to impede its performance.

Sir B. Boothby sent me, in manuscript, the elegy on your late illustrious friend, Mr Mason, which you kindly offer to transmit. I liked it very much; but I did not like Dr. Darwin's epitaph upon him. It is, or, at least when I saw it, it was without simplicity, pathos, or piety; fine picture, and only fine picture. Dr Darwin's principles incapacitate him for writing epitaphs as they ought to be written. That on Mrs French, in the Botanic Garden, is yet more exceptionable. It talks of Beauty pleading at the throne of God, —as if the Maker of the universe had partialities to female charms, like those imputed to the fabled Jupiter.

Adieu my dear paternal friend—may your life be lengthened to the last possibility of its comfort,

"Whose peaceful day benevolence endears,
Whose night congratulating conscience cheers."

LETTER XL.

COLIN MACKENZIE, Esq. of Edinburgh.

Lichfield, June 2, 1799.

FROM the time your priceless packet came, I have been, at frequent intervals, absorbed in Mr Scott's wonderfully fine epic ballad. Not one of the beautiful ballads in Percy's Collection is so interesting. I instantly committed it to memory. As Antony says of Cleopatra, it is of all hours. Glenfinlas* is for the initiated, but the Eve of St John agitates the dull dead-calm of unpoetic bosoms, while, to spirits rightly touched, infinite is its power to thrill and to impress.

You know there are two St Johns; but I conclude this is the Eve of the winter, rather than the summer saint, as the season so much better harmonizes with the finely obscure horrors of the scene, than would the softer hours of a summer night.

The dreary flame of the beacon on the wild

* See latter part of the letter to the same gentleman, dated Feb. 3d 1799, for mention of that very fine poem.—S.

lone hill, flaring to the wind, is a feature wholly new in poetic scenery. Its fierce red light, amid the solitude which surrounds it, is dismal "as the darkness visible" of Pandemonium itself: and charming in their lovely locality, are the landscapes of Melrose, and afterwards of Tiviotdale. The last, so totally unexpected, is the "sunny island in the stormy main," so much is its self-beauty increased by the contrasted objects and feelings which precede and succeed to it.

The only circumstance not original in this impressive poem, is the grasp of the apparition, and the ribbon thereafter worn on the scorched and withered wrist. That is taken from the awful tradition of Lord Tyrone's spectre in the chamber of Lady Berresford.

There appears one little oversight in this ballad:

> "Who spilleth life shall forfeit life,
> So bid thy lord believe,"

says the spirit. The baron's destiny does not accomplish that prediction. The silence of the severe monastic order, La Trappe, is not death. At the time the scene is laid, I conclude the feudal power of the barons was above the laws; but his suicide would fulfil the pro-

phecy; and if committed on the beacon-hill, would allow a recurrence of that novel object in the close, which might have a fine effect. The lady's criminal infidelity to her husband is justly punished in her expiatory darkness; but suppose the two* concluding stanzas were thus extended to four:

In three more years the rage of war
The beacon hills relight,
The rain falls fast, the wild winds roar
Loud on yon guilty height†.

Whose on the death-tree, scath'd and bare,
Whose is that perish'd form,
Reveal'd, at times, by the red flare,
Unquench'd by rain or storm?

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* There is a nun in Melrose bower
That never sees the sun;
There is a monk in Dryburgh tower,
That speaketh word to none.

The nun that never sees the day,
The monk that speaks to none:
That nun is Smaylhome's lady gay,
That monk the bold baron."

† The beacon-hill had been the place of assignation between the baron's lady and the knight he murdered in his jealousy.—S

And whose the moan, which oft the gales
From Melrose towers convey?
That is a nun, who never hails
The blessed light of day.

" The nun that never sees the day:
The tree-hung corse abhorr'd;
That nun was Smaylhome's lady gay,
That corse her murderous lord.

Do you not wonder at the effrontery, when a female hand attempts to shoot in the strong bow of your poetic Ulysses?

I remain, with high sense of poetic obligation, Sir, &c.

LETTER XLI.

Rev. T. S. Whalley.

Lichfield, June 7, 1799.

I congratulate you on the success of your play*. Many of my acquaintance have spoken to me of it as charming. My curiosity of perusal is extreme. I trust it is in blank verse. It would

* The Castle de Montval.—*S.*

be difficult for me to be pleased with a tragedy in prose, which yet I never was. Its advocates say it is more like real life; wax-work is more like real life than painting, but is it therefore better? From the quotations given in the newspapers, I fear Mr Sheridan's is of the degenerate class*; and if so, with all the advantages that buskined prose may receive from his glorious talents, I shall think of Shakespeare, of Beaumont and Fletcher, Otway, Lee, Rowe, Young, Thomson, and Jephson—and sigh.

It is great injustice that you may not be allowed to reap a part of the golden harvest you sowed; but pecuniary emolument was not your stimulus, and, thank God, is not essential to the delight of your success as a tragic writer.

You say I must read Mrs Siddons's part in your tragedy, as written for her manner of speaking, and for her's alone. I have always thought it her highest praise that she is no mannerist; but the warm, glowing, graceful creature who speaks, and looks, and moves by no other impulses but those of nature and passion, co-operating with beauty, elegance, and majesty. If she had any other singularity, except that of being the most perfect speaker that can be heard, she would not be the transcendent

* Pizarro.—*S.*

actress which she is invariably found in tragedy. I can associate her face and form with any given part I am reading, but can no otherwise conceive her expression of countenance, intonation, and emphasis, than by imagining, to the best of my power, how a woman of fine understanding, and feeling heart, would look and speak in the circumstances you have placed her. If more than that could be done, Mrs Siddons would not be, as she is, guiltless of ever overstepping the modesty of nature to produce stage-effect. Mrs Yates continually did that, and the pathetic Mrs Cibber had a plaintive monotone, which she could not vary; but Mrs Pritchard and Garrick *were*, and Mrs Siddons *is*, too great and just to be peculiar.

Never, till yesterday, have I seen or heard the celebrated, though not yet acted dramas on the passions; and of them only the Count de Montford, which Mr White read to me last night very finely. I like the style, it is often Shakespearean, without servile imitation. Many of the reflections and observations in the earlier scenes of that play, evince a discriminating insight into human feeling and character. The situations in the close are of soul-harrowing strength and horror. It appears indubitable that the sublime, though exceptionable novel, Caleb Williams, was the origin

of Mrs Radcliffe's design of writing plays illustrative of the passions, and the mischiefs that result from the absorbing dominion of any one of them; but the character of Falkland, in Caleb Williams, is a much more masterly comment on that text than the Count de Montford. Hatred, indulged to excess, must demonize any man; but when we perceive an high and delicate sense of honour the domineering idol of the soul, and find, as in Falkland, that a boundless devotion to its sway is capable of leading the human mind from great elevation of moral virtue to the last excesses of vice, naturally, and step by step, we find a nobler and more useful lesson of morality engraven on the heart. Greatly horrible effects are produced in the play of the Count de Montford, but nature and probability are grossly outraged in the incompetency of the causes which produce them. The native vices of the brutal Tyrrel are blended with the native virtues of Falkland; extremes which nature decreed should never meet. Falkland, it is true, becomes a demon, who was long an angel; but then the outrageous violence with which the vile Tyrrel persecutes and provokes, and, at length, by personal disgraceful insult, after every other abuse had been borne with the calmest sweetness, urges the stab of revenge from the greatly injured, preserves that apostasy from appearing unna-

tural! Those circumstances make the subsequent degeneracy of Falkland, extreme as it proves, not incredible. The object of De Montford's deadly hatred is amiable, gentle, sportive;—he repays it with a sweetness and magnanimity, to which De Montford is twice indebted for his life;—he even seeks the monster's friendship, and is guilty of no offence but that of having tried to jest him out of his surly aversion. It is not only out of probability, but of possibility, that such a nothing of a provocation could urge a man, whose disposition was originally generous, brave, and merciful, to the darkest, foulest, and most deliberate murder. It violates all unity of character, the only dramatic unity which ought to be kept sacred. In the ever, and on all occasions, dark, violent, and envious Tyrrel, such lust of hatred is natural, from the eclipsing graces, and talents, and consequent influence of Falkland disarming the despotism which Tyrrel's large fortune had long enabled him to exert in his neighbourhood. In the gallant and liberal Montford, it is monstrous and inconceivable. If he had been represented as implacable, though brave—if the pride and arrogance of his disposition had been heightened, and heightened also the gay contempt of Rezenvelt—and if Rezenvelt had not twice, or even once, given Montford his life, the grandly horrible effects

of the close might have been preserved in this play, without such total revolt of our credulity; but it is most true what Mrs Jackson observes, that, in all Mrs Radcliffe's writings, attentive only to terrific effects, she bestows no care upon their causes, and rashly cuts the knot of probability which she seems to want patience to untie. One has heard of a labouring mountain bringing forth a mouse: In Mrs R.'s writings mice bring forth mountains.

So many men of learning, most of them personally unknown, have written to me on my late publication, that my leisure has been totally absorbed in replying to them, and to my established correspondents on the subject. Thus have I, as yet, been prevented reading Miss More's new work, of which you speak so highly.

I congratulate you with my whole heart, that the continental campaign of this summer hitherto fulfils your prediction rather than mine. If it please God that the tide shall not turn again in favour of France, as it did after her defeats in 1793, and England and Germany will be content with the *status quo*, without resuming the mad project of coercing her as to the form of her government, we may then not have far to wade over the bloody gulf to the fair shore of peace. Then shall this dire war close, as all wars close, with

no advantages to any party to compensate the belligerent miseries, and well if it is no worse.—Adieu! Adieu!

LETTER XLII.

Rev. R. FELLOWES of Harbury, Warwickshire.

Lichfield, July 20, 1799.

ALLOW me to thank you for the honour you have done my late publication by your applausive, and, in itself, beautiful sonnet. Sincere praise is always welcome, but a poet's praise is of very heightened value.

Recently, and for the third time, have I perused your late admirable work*. All the vagrant ideas of my past life on the Christian system, I find collected and given back to me on your pages, connected by the most legitimate chain of inferences, and in language animated and perspicuous.

* A Picture of Christian Philosophy, by Robert Fellowes A. B. Oxon. Printed for John White, bookseller, Horace's Head, Fleet Street.—*S.*

How happily have you removed that dire impediment to rational faith, the doctrine of original sin, which the revived Calvinistic school, of which Mr Wilberforce is the head, so injudiciously presses upon the attention of the public. Its mystical tenets are read and extolled (in preference to those of the authors who represent Christianity as a system of consistent justice, mercy, benevolence, and happiness) from the same disposition, which makes children delight more in perceiving objects of terror presented to their imagination, than those of beauty and pleasure; but no mischievous or obstinate child is rendered gentle or docile by the dread of spectres; neither have the fanatic tenets any tendency to reclaim from vice or irreligious thoughtlessness. The licentious, or giddy votaries of fashion, wish to have an excuse for persisting in their career, and think they have found it in the dark and cruel difficulties in which resumed Calvinism involves Christianity. They say to themselves, "We cannot, in the high-day of our youth and passions, feel all this prescribed misery, which, we are told, is essential to appease our Maker for having created us full of cursedness and sin; we cannot sacrifice all our amusements, even those which are generally allowed to be innocent; and since less sacrifices are fruitless; since the Rock of Salvation is too steep and rug-

ged for our strength, we may as well strew all the sensual flowers over the paths which lead to our destruction; if, indeed, the Deity is this hard taskmaster, and if he created so large a part of mankind vessels of wrath; if all are obnoxious to punishment ere yet they know the nature of crime."

Such is the certain mischief of Mr W.'s doctrine, and that of his coadjutors. They transfer the hairy mantle, the tedious pilgrimage, and the voluntary scourge, and all the dark train of monkish self-inflictions, from the body to the mind. If voluntary wretchedness for less than atrocious sin, for the curse of our nature, not self-incurred, be indeed a duty, what, alas! must be the nature of that Power who enjoins it?

O that your volume, in which righteousness shines as a sun, in the pure beams of justice, of mercy, and of earthly happiness, may so gild the gentler ascent from the gulfs of impiety, that its hapless votaries may not despair of attaining the pure summit!

LETTER XLIII.

MRS STOKES.

High Lake, Aug. 23, 1799.

I CAME hither on the 22d of last month, and shall make it six weeks ere I quit this lawny and cheerful shore, and its peopled seas, covered with the sails of commerce. Visits, on my return home, to Lady Eleanor Butler and Miss Ponsonby, in their beauteous vale, and to Mr and Mrs Roberts, on their grandly scenic mountain, will probably make it at least the middle of September ere I sit down quiet in my own pleasant and embowered mansion at Lichfield.

Our society here is not disagreeable. It consists of several cheerful and well-bred, and some apparently amiable people. For the sympathy of attachment; for kindred spirits to my own; for much that is intellectual, I look not. If they present themselves amongst the stranger tribes of a public place, my heart and my imagination instantly feel their magnetism, and gladly welcome them. Miss Charlotte Lister, of our city, accompanied me hither, entrusted by her mother to

my chaperonship. She is a pretty blooming Hebe of nineteen, modest and very sweet tempered—smiles with complacency, and dances admirably.

What a rapid reverse in the tide of military conquest on the continent! The poignant joy inspired by events, of which there was so little rational expectation, in the minds of those who judged of the future by the past, must be extreme in the breast of all who love their country, and the common interests of Europe; but, alas! I perceive, from the papers, that it has rekindled the mania of coercing France into monarchy; of planting the standards of the allied powers in the centre of Paris; and it is deemed Jacobinism to doubt the possibility or wisdom of the attempt. If the *status quo ante bellum* is not to be the resting-mark of the sword, the war must prove, not a war of restoration, but of extermination; and the woes of Europe will be, to the present generation at least, interminable.

Curious are the articles of impeachment which the French are bringing forward against their late rulers. Deeply humiliating is it to all the partizans of the baneful democratic system here, and in every other country, to see the tyranny and injustice, which it has produced, confessed at full by the nation with whom it originated. It must

appal the unfortunate Bonaparte, when, in additional affliction to the blast of his hopes in Egypt, he sees the plan of that expedition, which, if not his, had his eager support and eager adoption, considered as treason to his country; to know that French philippics are thundered out against the baseness and impolicy of invading the neutral state of Switzerland, and of forcing the Ottoman empire to an alliance with the foes of France! Such denunciations reduce his destiny to that of perishing on the banks of the Nile; or, if he can return to his native country, there, probably, to bleed, by the mandate of a directory, on the borders of the Seine; or, at best, "to gnaw his heart in the obscurity of exile." Thus wither his luxuriant laurels; thus perish the boundless hopes of giant ambition, which, in him, there is every probability, as in the great Charles of Sweden,

> "Will leave a name at which the world grew pale,
> To point a moral, and adorn a tale."

Adieu.

LETTER XLIV.

REV. T. S. WHALLEY.

Lichfield, Oct. 7, 1799.

I AM recently returned from my summer's tour. Its Cambrian interests were very lively, as they were wont to be, during my week's residence on Mr Roberts' sublime mountain, and my four days visit to the ladies, falsely called the Recluses of Langollen Vale.

What a little court is the mansion of these ladies in that wondrous vale! Lords and ladies, gentlemen and ladies, poets, historians, painters, and musicians, introduced by the letters of their established friends, received, entertained, and retiring, to make way for other sets of company. They passed before my eyes like figures in a magic-lantern.

This, with little interruption, is the habit of the whole year, from Langollen being the high-road between Holyhead and London, and its vale the first classic and scenic ground of Wales. The evenings were the only time in which, from these [illegible]nal demands upon their attention, I could en-

joy that confidential conversation with them that is most delightful, from an higher degree of congeniality in our sentiments and tastes, than I almost ever met. Numbers have considered themselves as affronted from being refused admittance. I have witnessed how distressingly their time is engrossed by the immense and daily accumulating influx of their acquaintance, and by the endless requests to see their curious and beautiful place, and not seldom for admittance into their company. Beneath indiscriminate admission, they never could have a day-light hour for the society of their select friends. They have made an established rule not to admit visits to themselves from any persons, however high their rank, who do not bring letters of introduction from some of their own intimate friends. I have several times seen them reject the offered visits of such who either did not know this their rule, or, knowing, had neglected to observe it: and I always perceived such attempts at self-introduction pique that pride of birth and consequence, of which they have and acknowledge a great deal, eminently gracious as their manners are to those whom they do receive. When the sight of their house and gardens only is requested, they do not refuse, if they are alone, and can either walk abroad or retire up stairs; or, even if they have compa-,

provided they can walk out with that company, and are not at meals; but it is certain those impediments to general curiosity often occur—nor has any person a right to think their existence, and the disappointment it occasions, an incivility.

I am glad we agree so well on the subject of the Plays on the Passions. My literary friends now assert that they are not Mrs Radcliffe's; and, indeed, though the defects and merits of the plans and characters are each of her complexion, yet I always thought the masterly nature of several of the single speeches above her powers, as comparing them with her novels. There is one line poetically great and original as any thing in our language. Where De Montford, shuddering at the newly conceived idea of an impending marriage between his darling sister and hated rival, exclaims:

"The morning-star mix'd with infernal fire!"

Montford's soliloquy in the wood, is, as you observe, noble writing. It is in the same spirit with that of Narbonne, roaming through the aisles of the church at midnight, previous to the commission of that murder which proves parricidal. We find it hard to say which passage is the most sublime.

We find the effect of the interesting Pizarro greatly injured, no doubt, by the general absence of blank verse, as a vehicle of its sentiments; and still more by the involuntary slidings into measure, which is the appropriate language of tragedy. Prose and blank verse in the same sentence!—the mixture is monstrous, except where the latter is used as quotation. But I do not partake your avowed dislike to Shakespeare's custom of making the vulgar characters of his drama speak in prose; on the contrary, I think the effect good. In real life, we find a marked difference between the language of servants and their principals;—and prose for the first, and blank verse for the second, appears to me a just difference. As servants and other inferior people assume a softer tone, and endeavour at a better language when they are addressing gentlemen, so I believe Shakespeare generally, though not always, makes his more grovelling characters speak in blank verse during their dialogues with their superiors, though they had, perhaps, in a former scene, been conversing with each other in prose; and hence the offensive mixture of the two dialects is avoided.

It comforts me that our affairs on the Continent wear, on the whole, a more promising aspect than during several past years—notwith-

standing the ruthless infatuation of sending the flower of our armies to sink blasted in Holland. Have not our ministers had warning enough in our former failures, not to trust that Will o' th' Wisp of loyalty, which allures their credulity to the faithless bogs of that willingly enslaved country? End how it may, I shall ever think the war a more pernicious one;—that our liberties, our property, and our laws, would have been secure beneath the shade of the olive, and in the protection of our fleets. The *status quo ante bellum* will be deemed a glorious peace, and the waste of blood and treasure to this country will be forgotten:—I mean by the war-loving multitude: not that I believe treacherous France would have respected our neutrality more than she has done that of other countries; but we, in our water-walled domain, were beyond her reach, and the tyrannies of her democracy would have effectually prevented all the contagion of her example.—Adieu!

LETTER XLV.

MRS M. POWYS.

Lichfield, Oct. 1. 1799.

THE literary world now asserts that the Plays on the Passions are not Mrs Radcliffe's. I should have been incredulous to the report that they are, had not the errors, as to responsibility of causes to their effects, and the atoning excellence, resulting from the horrible grandeur of those effects in themselves, been of the same complexion with the faults and beauties in her novels. Otherwise the occasionally rich vein of poetry, which we find in the single passages, together with a degree of deep insight into the human mind, are above that level of talent which produced her romances. When I spoke my sentiments to you of the plays, I had not read their introductory dissertation. Now, after perusal, I confess it is far from pleasing me. The ideas in that tract are confused and abortive, and the language has no felicity. Abounding in Scoticisms, *that*, at least, cannot have been written by an Englishwoman — and Mrs R. is an

English woman. They now tell us this work is from the other side the Tweed. A young poet, of the name of Scott, and a native of Edinburgh, has sent me poems of his in manuscript, Glenfinlas, and the Eve of St John; each of which bear the stamp of a genius fully responsible for the Plays on the Passions. I have not, however, any other reason to believe them his. The real author cannot be long of being *deterré*. It is rumoured that he does not mean to pursue his plan. I think it a fine one, but of very difficult execution. Gigantic miseries are seldom produced by one uncompounded passion; ungoverned vanity combines with ungoverned love to produce them in Count Basil, and even De Montford's character, which adheres more to the author's first design, is not simply illustrative of the mischiefs of hatred;—originally hatred, that passion is, in the course of the play, so compounded with envy, as to make that the more operative feeling of the two.

I thank you for taking the kind trouble to point out those of my sonnets which best pleased you. It is agreeable to recur to them, and they meet my eye gilded by the consciousness that they are the favourites of so dear a friend; but I am sorry that you disapprove the publication of such as

breathe those sorrows which flowed from the cruel alienation of my forever loved Honora's affection.

I have shewn you the tinted print from Romney's fine picture of Serena in the Triumphs of Temper, and which bears such perfect, though accidental, resemblance to Honora, when she was in the glory of her virgin graces. It is in the very posture in which she often sat reading before she went to rest—so used she to fold her night-robe around her lovely limbs. The luxury of mournful delight with which I continually gaze upon that form, is one of the most precious comforts of my life.

My writings—the Monody on André, his letters published with that poem—the sonnets that refer to Honora, which they had seen in manuscript—my description of her, had so interested Lady Eleanor Butler and Miss Ponsonby, that, when they heard me say I had a perfect image of her in the print of Romney's Serena, they were extremely desirous to obtain one of the impressions; but they were all long since bought up. I was, however, fortunate enough to procure, though not to purchase, one for them. I got it framed and glazed, with an entablature over the figure, thus inscribed: "Such was Honora Sneyd!"

I am gratified that you take pleasure in reflect-

ing upon the talents, graces, and virtues of that faithful lover, and too intrepid soldier, Major André—that you continue to read my poem on his destiny, and his own letters annexed to it, with melancholy delight. I believe that neither man nor woman, ever loving Honora, could cease to love her. All the dark colour of André's fate took its tint from disappointed and unconquerable attachment to her.

The grand expedition to Holland verifies the prediction of common sense. Our blood-lavish ministry now discover, after having sacrificed so large a part of our fine army, that it was too late in the year for the attempt upon so wet a country, and that the French are in too much force to allow the Dutch to venture a junction with the English and Russians. Here is no counteraction, from events not to be foreseen, to justify such a new waste of blood and treasure. Will no chastizing experience convince our rulers, that England can never send armies to the Continent but to their destruction? All our officers allow that, in despite of English bravery, the French, no less daring, excel us as much in military tactics as we excel them in the naval ones.

I do not think I have, or ever shall have, health to encounter the inevitable hurries of a short residence in London, and a long one would not

suit my convenience. My connections there are now large and complicated, and they would leave me none of that quietness necessary to my impaired constitution; but be assured, that I do not less regret than yourself, the distance which separates us. I wish I could spend a few more weeks with you, either at my house or yours, ere I go hence and be no more seen.—While I am, I am faithfully your friend.

LETTER XLVI.

THOMAS PARK, ESQ.

Lichfield, Nov. 10, 1799.

I GRIEVE that your plan of visisting me in September with Mrs Park, was arrested,—yet more that it was arrested by disease.

It will give me true satisfaction to learn that your and Mrs Park's lately disordered health is restored. The human frame must have partaken with vegetable nature in the mal-influence of this ungenial year. November, alas! is come, with all its storms, and the wreck of the drowned harvest perishes beneath them. For that and for its

lamentable consequence I mourn; nor less for the sanguinary folly which sent the flower of our army to follow the glimmer of that *ignis fatuus* loyalty, which delusively played amid the Dutch marshes. Are you not indignant of the cool effrontery with which the ministerial people acknowledge that it was too late in the year for the attempt, and that they did not foresee that France would send such overawing reinforcements to prevent the power of the Stadtholder's friends from daring to manifest its combining principle? Did our rulers expect that France would sleep over our invasion, or imagine that God again,

> "As once in Gibeon, and for longer space,
> Should interrupt and stop the annual course
> Of the undeviating and punctual sun?"

I read last night, in the Evening Mail, a paragraph to the following purport. It was in the conclusion of an absurd eulogium on the Emperor of Russia's mad manifesto, the rival in impolicy of the Duke of Brunswick's in the commencement of this devastating war. "Thus, without any view of parcelling out France, to seat the last of the Bourbon line upon the throne of his ancestors, we are authorized to declare, is henceforth

to be the fixed object, the unalterable purpose of the present war!!"

It flatters me that you so industriously sought, and pleases me that you have procured my monodies, which Dr Darwin used to call the Epic Elegies. Are not dear André's letters, subjoined to the Monody, exquisite specimens of original talents, and fine imagination, adorning the effusions of an impassioned heart?—and are they not lovely in the freshness of untainted youth?

You have seen, or, I trust, you will see, Mr Fellowes's beautiful work, which demonstrates that the Christian system wars not with any innocent gratification of the taste or fancy, even of those over which the revived Calvinistic school has thrown the gloom of imputed criminal tendency. Mr F. proves, that where virtue is, they are virtuous. He also removes the great barrier to rational faith, that strange doctrine of original sin, which it is impossible to reconcile to the justice of the Deity. He shews that it is nowhere to be found on the pages of the four Evangelists. It appears to me that questions may be added to his arguments; questions which are conclusive against the doctrine. Did not Adam sin, whom that doctrine supposes to have been created with-

out propensity to evil?—nay, did he not sin upon a trifling temptation? Where, then, is the difference between his nature and that of his posterity? Each had trial.

I have grieved for the effect of the late raging winds upon my vegetable family. The vernal pride of my shrubbery, a gelder-rose, ten feet high, and the growth of near twenty years, with a neighbouring lilach, almost as tall, are prostrate. Thus a sloping knowl, which overlooks the lovely vale of Stowe, is denuded. The depredation will cost me a thousand sighs. I loved the snowy pride of my fallen Sylvia; and Cowper's description had yet more endeared her beauty:

> "When up she threw, into the darkest gloom
> Of neighbouring cypress, or more sable yew,
> Her silver globes, light as the foamy surf,
> Which the wind severs from the broken wave."

Mr Capel Loft's commendation of my sonnets, in the Critical Review, preceded by that laboured dissertation upon sonnets in general, explaining their construction by Greek terms, is not likely to catch the public attention. The general reader, perceiving himself bewildered in a maze of scholastic technicisms, will not proceed so far as to inform himself whether the strictures approve or

condemn the work of which they treat. The definition was superfluous; because my preface contains Mr White's so much more comprehensible analysis, the principles of which Mr C. Loft does not combat. However, I consider his warm praise as highly honourable to my sonnets, and take it thankfully.

I have never seen a British Critic, since the arrogant nonsense of its pages, respecting Mr Polwheel's poems, met my eye, and sickened me afresh of that publication. I by no means desired to peruse what it has said about my last work, nor have I seen it,—though I am, within these three months, become acquainted with the known, and, I believe, acknowledged editor of the British Critic, Mr Nares. He is lately made canon of this cathedral, and kept his first residence during the months of August and September. I returned home in the close of it. My cousin, Thomas White, and his wife, Henry's brother and sister, live in Mr Nares' canonical house. They, cousin H. White, and Mr Nares, dined and supt with me a few days before our new canon left Lichfield. His countenance and manners are of very prepossessing sweetness, and they have obtained for him general praise and esteem. I could not resist their influence, in despite of a pretty strong sensation in disfavour of a man,

who, as editor of the work, could sanction such a pragmatical and unjust criticism as had met my eye in the British Critic, even supposing it had not descended from his own pen.

Mr Nares is full of anecdote—loves music, sings agreeably, smiles ingenuously, and is gay. What portion of that knowledge he may possess, which is termed scholastic, I know not; but that his taste is not at all awakened to the irradiations of fancy in English literature, I had proof in the apathy with which he listened to the sublime Glenfinlas, by Mr Scott, not yet printed, and also to his original and interesting dramatic ballad, the Eve of St John. His eye marked none of their beauties while he listened. Unpublished and unheard-of compositions, are the tests of the taste and judgment of the listener. Towards them feeling is either dead or alive; it is no puppet danced upon the wires of others. However, when these poems shall emerge, I think, from what Mr Nares heard said of them that day, he will not venture to permit his publication to abstain from praising them.

You ask my opinion of the new poem, Pleasures of Hope, and observe that it is thought an ingenious counterpart to the Pleasures of Memory. It was lent me, for a short time, and my perusal was single and hurried. I rose from it

without any impression of having found on its pages much of the strength of original genius.

Adieu! Your ever obliged, &c.

LETTER XLVII.

CH. SMYTH, Esq. of Lincoln's Inn.

Lichfield, Nov. 29, 1799.

THE packet before me, for which I thank you, is rich in testimonies of kindness and of genius. The sonnet* with which you honour my late publication of Sonnets and Horatian Paraphrases, praises them in a strain which might gratify an ear made delicate by riot of encomium. The

* *Sonnet to Miss* SEWARD. *By* CHRISTOPHER SMYTH, *Esq.*

NOT in thy bowers, Valclusa, when the strain,
Breath'd by the Spirit of love to night's still ear,
Fondly bewail'd fair Laura's timeless bier,
And mourn'd, on Sorga's banks, her loss in vain,
Did purer melody the soul enchain,
Than when, of late, the Muse, to Britain dear,
Tun'd her chaste lyre, that heaven might stoop to hear,
And with its magic charm'd her native plain.

little gems, with which you enrich my Delphic cabinet, shall not, through my means at least, steal into the day-light they would adorn, through the channel of your aversion. I do not partake that aversion: names of high poetic celebrity have graced the monthly repositories, and I often think little compositions of genuine beauty, appear with added brilliance from the foils with which, so situated, they are sure to be surrounded.

Were you, by frequent association, to exchange *acquaintance* with Mrs Childers of Cantly Lodge, for *intimacy*, you would find your trust in her talents, and presentiment of her virtues, confirmed. She has that vivid sensibility of the powers of genius, and that cultured judgment, which stamp the highest value on her praise, and teach us to rely on its being the harbinger of lasting fame. An exquisite little poem on the beauty, utility, and comfort of the Sabbath-institution, was, at my earnest

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Then why, thou sweet enthusiast, bid farewell
To the rich music of its various chime*?
O sweep, with volant touch, thy chorded shell,
Yet, yet again, and swell the lofty rhyme,
To virtue's praise; nor with less rapture dwell
On nature's awful scenes and works sublime!

* Vide last of Miss Seward's Centenary of Sonnets.

request, sent to the Gentleman's Magazine for last March; though I could not prevail upon her to permit her name to be annexed. It is an answer to Southey's Sunday Morn.

Alas! how has her gentle heart been torn by suspence and anxiety for the fate of her son-in-law and affectionate friend, Colonel Childers, and for that of her own and only son, cornet in the same regiment! It was in that ill-planned, and worse executed invasion of Holland, which had never been made, at least on the verge of winter, if our cabinet had set the slightest degree of value on the lives and property of Englishmen. I thank God the name of Childers is not on the long and dreadful list of the sacrifices.

This horrid war exhibits, in broad and bloody characters, a lesson against different nations combining in such military league as involves their acting in concert. Austria and Prussia combined against France,—they quarrelled and failed. Austria and England combined against France,—they quarrelled and failed. Austria and Russia combine against France, they quarrel, and their conquests melt from their grasp. England and Russia invaded Holland, now a province to France, and each lays upon the other the miserable result.

Buonaparte proves a second Oliver. This resemblance of epoch, character, and conduct, to

the period of our commonwealth, would strongly prognosticate the return of monarchy in France, if the short-sighted jealousy of neighbouring governments would, by forbearance, leave France at leisure to perceive how incompetent such struggling, vexing sway, to remedy the evils of crowned despotism. While France is fighting for what she believes will be liberty, she can never feel to purpose that, as it has been, so it must ever be an empty name, amid the throes of elective rule.

Your glowing encomium on my embryo epic* would be powerful to stimulate its progress, if this oppressive malady in my head did not combine with the claims upon my attention, verbal and epistolary, to arrest its course. Nor less am I flattered by what you say on the subject of my little poem on the future existence of brutes. Whenever my miscellany appears, it will be found in that collection. It will probably induce the bigots to load its author with invective. I should not wonder if this my avowal of the claims upon Divine Justice of suffering innocence, in every class of being, to hereafter compensation, should induce them to declare me infidel. Nothing is too absurd, too self-evidently false for that spirit of gloomy enthusiasm, and pharisaic calumny, which stalks

* Telemachus.—*S.*

abroad amongst us, under high authority, layic and sacerdotal. It is not less injurious to cheerful piety and rational Christianity, than are the atheistical and deistical tenets of what is called modern philosophy. Its pernicious teachers are the spawn of Epicurus, Voltaire, Hume, and Gibbon. You are not of either school. You believe and obey Him, whose yoke is easy and whose burden is light. O may I, and all I love, endeavour to obey his precepts, nor find our trust in the mercy of our Creator vain!

LETTER XLVIII.

THOS. PARK, ESQ.

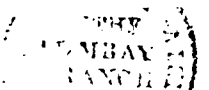
Lichfield, Jan. 30, 1800.

A PASSAGE in your last letter gave me an electric degree of surprise. In my first startled wonder, and without waiting to finish your letter, I rushed to my volume of Chatterton's poems, to find those lines in the elegy on Philips, which the personification of winter in one of my sonnets so much resembles. My volume of Chatterton's poems came out in 1778. I always believed it

contained every thing he had published or left behind him. I remember to have seen some of the short poems which are there collected, in the magazines during my youth. This volume of miscellanies contains no elegy on Philips, nor have any of its compositions the lines you quote.

Certainly the resemblance between Chatterton's personification of winter and mine are too strong to have been the result of coincidence, and must be unconscious plagiarism, and that on my part. I conclude this elegy was printed in some of the magazines during its author's lifetime; that it there met my eye, and this its picture of winter impressed my imagination, though I lost, as years rolled on, my recollection of its source. Disposed to write a sonnet on winter, I conclude some features of Chatterton's impersonization of that season came forward, from the large deposit of English poetry in my brain, and rendered me an unconscious plagiarist.

Long before the fame of this miraculous creature had gone abroad, the verses which appeared with his name in the magazines, and with a brief account of the obscurity of his birth, and his entire deprivation of literary instruction, had inspired my youthful mind with conviction of the magnitude of his genius, so finely, of late years,



eulogized by Mr Coleridge in the following lines:

> ——— " Britannia's boast, the wond'rous boy,
> An amaranth, that earth scarce seem'd to own,
> Blooming in poverty's bleak wintry shade,
> Till disappointment came, and pelting wrong,
> Beat it to earth."

Soon after the volume above mentioned appeared, I spoke of its author to Johnson, with the warmest tribute of my admiration; but he would not hear me on the subject, exclaiming,— " Pho, child! don't talk to me of the powers of a vulgar uneducated stripling. He may be another Stephen Duck. It may be extraordinary to do such things as he did, with means so slender; —but what did Stephen Duck do, what could Chatterton do, which, abstracted from the recollection of his situation, can be worth the attention of learning and taste? Neither of them had opportunities of enlarging their stock of ideas. No man can coin guineas, but in proportion as he has gold."

Though Chatterton had been long dead when Johnson began his Lives of the English Poets; though this stupendous miscellany had then been some time before the world; though its contents

had engaged half the literati of the nation in controversy, yet would not Johnson allow Chatterton a place in those volumes in which Pomfret and Yalden were admitted. So invincible were his grudging and surly prejudices—enduring long-deceased genius but ill—and contemporary genius not at all.

The great Thomas Warton has, in his edition of Milton's lesser works, instanced, on almost every page, passages of as striking resemblance to Milton's poetic predecessors in English verse, as the opening of my twenty-seventh sonnet to a passage in Chatterton. From the riches of Milton's imagination, I should suppose that these resemblances, too precise for coincidence, were also involuntary plagiarisms. The involuntary plagiarisms from English poetry, in those compositions of Chatterton's, which he wished to impose upon the public for ancient, formed one of the strongest proofs by which Mr T. Warton, Mr Mason, and Horace Walpole were enabled to pronounce them modern. Exemption from involuntary plagiarisms, to which every writer, conversant in poetry, is subject, affords proof as strong of the ancientry of the Ossianic compositions. It is true, the desolation of Balclutha resembles that of Nineveh in Isaiah, but, I think, not in a degree beyond possible coincidence;—and there is also another

picture of equal resemblance to the shepherd Norval's description of that stormy night on which he found the infant Douglas in his floating cradle. Home was a Scotsman, and it is more probable, if it was not coincidence, that he drew from the Erse fragments of Ossian, which are said to be popular, to this day, in the Highlands, than that Macpherson built, in that instance, with Home's materials, or was capable of fabricating thos sublime and exquisite works. Through their whole course, those two are the only instances of passages at all similar to the writings of others. Every other poet, however great, and, on the whole, original, may be perpetually traced to his conscious and unconscious sources, in the writings of his predecessors and contemporaries.—Milton eternally, and Shakespeare very often.

You inquire after my opinion of Young as a poet. I always thought that, on a balance of his faults and beauties, a great sum of excellence remained. His satires are spirited and just; his plays, like his Night Thoughts, grand, but extravagant; often turgid, and oftener still genuinely great. Of the Night Thoughts, the three first are far the richest in noble passages. In the remaining six, we find much exuberance and tautologic repetition, and sometimes strange fancies, of almost ludicrous coarseness. He seems not to know

when he has sufficiently worked a fine idea—but wire-draws it till the spirit is lost. Yet he more frequently charms by the bright reverse of these errors, and becomes luminous, comprehensive, striking, and sublime.

Godwin's St Leon has engaged my recent attention. The story is far less interesting than that of his Caleb Williams—yet is it a grand work: and though two impossible attainments, that of making gold by transmutation, and of renewing juvenescence by an elixir, form the basis of the history, a sublime moral results from the evils which, were such powers attainable, they must naturally, perhaps inevitably, produce; evils far greater than can result from the bitterest poverty, or from the uncertain, and, at the longest, brief duration of life. Striking and deep observations on human nature, perpetually occur on the pages of St Leon, to which every feeling heart bears an echo. Godwin's writings, bold and novel, exhibit one of many proofs, in this immediate period, of the inexhaustible source of genius in the human mind.

I cannot allow you to place yourself in the number of those who only feel the sensibilities of the poetic character, without its energies. Your poetic Miscellany bears spirited testimony against this self-injustice. Adieu!

LETTER XLIX.

REV. R. FELLOWES.

Lichfield, March. 10, 1800.

I HAVE much for which to thank you; for an intention of visiting Lichfield, whose accomplishment would have delighted me, and whose counteraction I regret; for your active solicitude for the preservation of my life, threatened by a dangerous malady; and for a *new composition, which does your talents and your principles the highest honour. It appears to me that reason, truth, and demonstration support your arguments in this work, and that imagination adorns them with very brilliant hues.

I have ever thought, with you, that the inevitable, and factious struggles for power in a republic, and still more in what is termed a pure democracy, are, in a greater degree, injurious to the security and peace of the people, than even a

* Morality united with Policy; or, Reflections on the Old and New Government of France. Printed for John White, Horace's Head, Fleet Street, 1800.—*S.*

despotic monarchy, and have exclaimed with Goldsmith,

"I fly from petty tyrants to the throne;"

therefore must it gratify me highly to see my own general ideas on the subject thus analyzed, proved, and illustrated, by one for whom I feel so much esteem. Suffer me, however, to confess my opinion, that respecting the direly-featured French revolution, with the cause to which you chiefly impute it, viz. the depravity and licentious conduct of the French clergy, which made the generality of the people infidels, and the rest gloomy and useless bigots, other causes combined. Remember the contemptuous ridicule on their imputed slavery, which had, through ages, been a prominent feature in our senatorial oratory, on our stage, in our very pulpits; how incessantly it stung and goaded them from those proud islanders, beneath whose prosperity and greatness the genius of France stood rebuked. This, our ever-avowed disdain of their submission to despotism, I think one of the preparatory causes, but the emancipation of America far the most efficient.

It has long appeared to me that the chastisement of retributory consequence has visited this country, and the court of France; the first for

its injustice, the second for its treachery in that Transatlantic war. But, for the unjust attempt of England upon those established privileges which formed the constitution of her colonies, I verily believe France had never, at least not in this age, ceased to be a monarchy, and that the calamities of an exterminating contest had been spared to Europe. The French court foresaw the mischiefs which the English were bringing upon themselves, and guilefully and basely encouraged them to pursue their destructive scheme of violence, by promised support and alliance, and then, most dishonourably and dishonestly, fought with America against England, engaging Spain and Holland in the combination.

Poor Louis the XVI. always declared the reluctance with which he yielded to the solicitation of his queen and ministers to this betraying and faithless plan, the resulting evils of which, towards France, fell afterwards so heavy on himself, his family, and his nobles. The emancipation of our colonies, and its glory to them, became a seducing example to the French populace, and planted in their hearts the seeds of revolt, avenging upon that government its violated faith; avenging, also, upon this country, in the calamities of the present contest, its injustice to America.

Nor yet is the cup of retribution full, since England is insanely bent upon prolonging, in interminable prospect, the desolation, the cruel miseries and ruinous expense of the war. Such is her jealousy, and impotent rage of crushing the monster, whose conception her long series of sarcastic reproach for imputed slavery had promoted, and to whose birth she was the certain, though involuntary midwife, by her tyrannous attempt upon American freedom. She is now making the same unjust assault upon the long-established privileges of Ireland.

At first I hailed the revolution in France as a glorious attempt to procure for that country the blessings of a limited monarchy, but I soon saw, in the tyranny exerted towards its mild monarch, and in the interference of the neighbouring nations, that the result would prove a fatal blow to rational liberty in Europe, and most of all, in this country; that it would, as you finely express it, place British freedom upon a narrow and wasting isthmus, between anarchy and despotism. Had this revolution happened beneath the reign of a tyrant, it might have acted upon other kingdoms with a warning influence against tyranny. As it was, our king and parliament, with nine-tenths of the English people, impute it chiefly, and but that they choose to call in the aid of reli-

gious zeal to support sanguinary measures, most opposite to the gospel precepts, they would, exclusively, impute the overthrow of monarchy in France to the concessions made by the king in favour of his subjects liberties.

Hence every rational and religious plan for the reformation of abuses is termed Jacobinism. Hence Mr Pitt dared to say, in the senate, not a month ago, that to assert that the interests of the few ought to be subordinate to those of the many, was maintaining the vital principle of Jacobinism. Hence, while he and his adherents justly represent our foes as crippled in their navy, their commerce ruined, and most of their military conquests wrested from their possession, they are absurd enough to declare that there can be no security for England in a peace with France; as if that ruin to us, which, under her monarchy, and in the plenitude of her power and greatness, she could not effect, she was likely to compass in the disordered and exhausted state in which she must long remain.

France never kept peace with England when she thought it for her interest to break it; neither did this country with her! What has ever been will ever be, whether the Gallic government be republic, democratic, consular, or monarchical; but each nation stands now more in need of a

long peace than after any former war, and therefore, when made, it will probably be of proportionate duration.

It is insulting nonsense to plead the vices of Buonaparte, or the instability of his power, as a reason for prolonging the miseries of war. His mortality might as rationally be pleaded. An opportunity was opened, by his late concessions, for obtaining a general pacification, and probably upon good terms for England and her allies; and the present debilitated state of France is the true security for its permanence; far greater than could result from the Bourbon family regaining that power which is now vested in the Cromwell of that country.

It is plain that our rulers are bent upon forcing it back into monarchy, or crushing and dismembering it according to their former Quixotism; but while France is so much weakened as to be less than ever formidable to England, she is yet too proud to be her vassal, too great to be struck from her existence as a nation, by any human power, single or combined.

In Government refusing to restore one of the removed pillars of our freedom, the Habeas Corpus act, we see how our isthmus wastes on the side of despotism. That removal was pleaded as

a necessary check to Jacobinism. It is now perfectly known, that if ever the principle existed in any formidable degree in England, it has received its death wound here, in our experience of the misersies it has produced in France.

On other occasions, our ministry plead the present perfect satisfaction of the nation in their measures, yet they will not replace this national column. Then do they not shew us, in the abuse of that despotic power, which its removal has given them, its infinite consequence to individual protection? They prevent their state prisoners from being brought to trial! they make them languish whole years in imprisonment. Thus is no one, confessing dislike to the present measures, secure in his person at this hour in England.

Adieu! I have written beneath sensations of confusion in my brain, which have probably communicated their mal-influence to my style. My disorder takes large strides upon my strength and spirits.

LETTER L.

THOMAS PARK, ESQ.

Buxton, June 12, 1800.

WHAT an age have I been indebted to you for a very kind and interesting letter! You will, however, I know, accept the too just excuse I may plead, and which I am obliged to plead to all my correspondents. The dizzy malady did not soften during the period which has elapsed since I wrote last. Experienced benefit in former years, beneath a weaker degree of the same disorder, enabled the anchor of hope to gleam to me afar off from this fountain's edge. Its magnetic influence drew me hither, though, conscious that in this more northern climate, "Pale winter, lingering, chill'd the lap of May;" and so it proved. I left Staffordshire in the full bloom of vernal luxuriance, and found here bleak and leafless sterility, and a thin invalid *corps* in all the hotels. Soon, however, the foliage peeped from the few trees of this scene, and juvenile satellites began to appear around the dim and waning orbs of existence.—Yourself and Mrs Park ought to

have been here, since you are sufferers from the rheumatism. That fiend of the joints is nowhere so successfully laid, as it is called, as amidst these waters. Precious had such an association proved to me. It has not, on this excursion, been given me to converse with many very congenial spirits. Your muse and mine appear together in the library window of this golden semilunar palace, amidst the mountains; but verse seems a dead-letter to every person here; the taste for it appears to recede more and more from the palate of the age. Dr Johnson wrote the lives of our bards to lead the reading world from the bright and pure eminences on which they sit into the marshy levels of prose compositions, by the *ignis fatuus* power of his satiric wit; and Mr Gisborne tells us no poetry ought to be written or read which has not an immediately religious tendency. So absurd is this age, that it is no longer sufficient that the sallies of poetic fancy should be innocent, wholly free from the pernicious alloy of immoral or immodest tendency—but it would be just as wise to prohibit every subject in conversation that is not morally didactic or devotional.

Yet a few more days, and my pilgrimage in this land of strangers will end. Hitherto I may not boast very perceptible benefit in my principal

malady. I have these last nine days been extremely indisposed in my stomach. People tell me it is the effect of the water and bath, contending with bile, and expelling it. I am, however, by no means sure that I have a bilious constitution. My complexion has no tint which bespeaks that tendency. Should it be so, my dizziness may have had that source, and my present malady prove eventually favourable.

Sorry am I to find that our triple winter, as you justly call it, has been so unpropitious to the health of yourself and Mrs Park; that pain and dejection have hovered over the couch, near that hearth, of which genius and literature, love and friendship, are the Lares. Our spring, which has been so genial, chased, I trust, the sombre influences, and left the bright ones to their wonted and cloudless operations.

I agree with you that it is not amongst our modern songs that the musical composer is to look for his happiest verbalism; but surely the rich sources of English poetry exempt him from the necessity of taking words, which are already adapted to airs in possession of the public ear. For serious glees, and even solo airs, Ossian has long been a mine; and amongst the odes of Cowley, Collins, Gray, Mason, and Akenside, little detached passages may be found, proper for every

style of composition, all new and unworn on the actual lyre. The third stanza of Akenside's Ode on the Winter Solstice, would make a beautiful glee, beneath the hand of musical genius. The gaiety of the first part of the stanza, and the pensive solicitous sentiment of the latter, suggest and demand the fascinating power of harmonic contrast. For a gay glee, or solo air, perhaps the following lines, an extempore of this moment, might not be improper.

Now Spring wakes the May-morn, the sweetest of hours,
Calls the lark to the sunbeam, the bee to the flowers;
Calls youth, love, and beauty their homage to pay,
And weave their gay garlands to honour the May;
Yet hope not, whate'er of soft joys it may bring,
That the season, so jocund, will pause on its wing.

Since I came here I have heard of the death of Mr Hayley's darling protegé: Alas!—and also of the decease of a valued poetic friend of mine, Rev. W. B. Stevens of Repton. About his 25th year he published a fine poem, in blank verse, entitled Retirement. It was a poetic morning of bright promise; but the pitchy cloud of the reviewers' perceptions darkened its pure and crystal rays—nor could the mob of readers perceive its lustre through that dense medium of unjust censure. Consequently, being a maiden work, it

had no sale, and the high-minded reserve of the author was irreparably disgusted. He published no more; and now, alas, the golden fountain of his genius is for ever dried up, ere half the age of man was attained. Such are the mischiefs of incompetent and self-elected censorship.

LETTER LI.

REV. T. S. WHALLEY.

Buxton, June 14. 1800.

AFTER passing a month at this place, I purpose returning home next week, without having much cause to flatter myself that the malady which brought me hither is subdued.

Sorry I am to find you a fellow-sufferer with me in that wretched dizziness, so much more annoying than pain, even when not by pain accompanied. The Bath waters cured my friend Simpson of that disease—why do not you, who are, comparatively speaking, on their confines, resort to them? The Buxton springs are of resembling, though gentler effects, with the superior advantage of a pure mountainous air, sharp,

but bracing, free from the noxious city-effluvia, and from the no less noxious influence of a too luxuriant vegetation.

I am comforted that the sombre style, in which your letter commences, brightens on its progress. Your heart cheers and expands beneath the local influence of your scene, rising to your pen; that scene, so lovely, and so beloved! You delineate its rude, native graces; then paint it cultured and adorned as it is by your sylvan industry and taste; and this in colours so vivid, that they pass before my memory in all their charms. Ah! will they ever again meet my actual vision? Ill health, war, which, upon the system it is now carried on, must be interminable at any period, short of that which shall bring utter distress and ruin upon this country; heavier and heavier ministerial depredations every year on our property!—Circumstances like these darken the perspective of hope, when it is bent on the far distant habitations of our friends.

I am charmed with the new ebullition, in your last, of connubial love and gratitude. Long may the priceless blessing remain to you, the value of which you so justly, and so amiably appreciate. The venerable Mrs Whalley, senior, your excellent mother, alive at 96, and in full possession of her faculties! May the attenuated thread of her

existence be yet longer spun, even till intellect and comfort will be its associates no more.

Have you read that sublimely fabulous novel St Leon? My literary correspondent, Mr Fellowes, thus speaks of it:

"I think this work of Godwin's atones for the former paradoxes of his vanity or errors of his heart. Godwin appears to possess a mind open to conviction, and to be in train to be a Christian. His opinions have lately undergone strange changes. He who is so lately become the warm and eloquent panegyrist of connubial love, domestic sympathy, and kindred connections, is likely to feel, at length, the beautiful simplicity of the Christian doctrine, and to enter himself the able champion of revelation; but to return to his novel. What a picture of terrific sublimity is exhibited in the person of Bethlem Gabor! I contemplated it with awe, and my aversion to such utter extinction of sympathy in an human heart was almost subdued by the grandeur which envelopes every lineament of his ferocity. The character of St Leon also is conceived with distinctness, and maintained with consistency. The power of early impressions in weaving the inextricable web of the future character, is marked with great ability, and nice discrimination. The misery associated with the extraordinary powers

possessed by St Leon, must make a highly moral impression on the mind, teaching it that acquiescence in the present state of things, which is essential to happiness. It proves that the greatest curse which could be inflicted on man, would be the gratification of his boundless wishes; and that while a certain degree of security is necessary to our enjoyments, there is a degree of it which, in the present frame and temper of the human heart, would be the destruction of our happiness." Adieu.

LETTER LII.

EDWARD JERNINGHAM, ESQ.

Lichfield, June 23, 1800.

THANK you for your interesting * volume, our attention to my health, your friendly counsel. I was at Buxton when these testimonies of friendship arrived at Lichfield. Your letter followed me

* Select Sermons, translated from the French of Bossuet, Bishop of Meaux, to which is prefixed an Essay on the Eloquence of the Pulpit in England. Printed for Clark, New Bond Street, 1800.

thither; your book waited my return. I staid to read you in print, ere I answered you in manuscript.

Your prefatory essay on the defects of our pulpit oratory is very ingenious; yet I am inclined to believe it complains of a remediless habit of style; that its so much quieter nature than that of the French prelate, from whom you give specimens of fervent example, is too deeply laid in the more sober tenets of our religion, in national character, and national taste, and in the less secluded lives of our priests, to make it eligible for them to adopt the personal appeals, the familiar pathos, the passionate exhortations, and fulminating threats of the Catholic pulpit.

That our liturgy is more glowing than the sermons which succeed it, I confess; but it should be remembered that prayer is, in its very nature, more fervid than admonition. Then the ascetic lives of the Papal clergy throw a sacredness around them, disposing their auditors to listen more reverently to their persuasions, more submissively to their philippics.

But when we see that man in the pulpit whom we are in the habit of meeting at the festal board, at the card-table, perhaps seen join in the dance, and over whose frailties, in common with our

own, no holy curtain has been drawn, we expect modest exhortation, sober reasoning, chastized denunciation; and I have uniformly seen the congregation more disgusted than touched and alarmed by the bolder style you wish to see prevail, especially where the preacher was young, and not invested with the ensigns of elevated office.

It must be considered also, that superstition is ever more vehement than rational faith; Popery than Protestantism; the fancied immediate inspiration of our Methodists and other sectaries, than the tenets of the Church of England. Popery had to stimulate the mind to immense and unnatural sacrifices, those of the connubial propensities, the attachments, filial, fraternal, and social; and she knew that reason had not competent powers; that, to combat those lightsome passions, it was necessary to call in the aid of the darker. So also the modern Calvinistic school, which inculcates the principles of Methodism, without confessing its name. The English laws allow not monastic seclusion, with its severe corporal penances. Our celebrated essential Methodists invent monasteries for the mind, with all their dismal train of needless renunciations; of that great moral school, the stage; of the innocent delights of the opera, the concert-room, and

the dance; with those rigid and gloomy tenets of hereditary cursedness, and miserable amenability for other sins than our own.

To enforce these dreary precepts, their preachers use the same means the Papal clergy employ; they combat the gentler by the ungentler passions; and, to excite them, are necessitated to agitate themselves, and their congregation, and their readers, by the ebullition of enthusiasm. It is expected that the pulpit eloquence of the reformed and established church, should, like the spirit and maxims of the Saviour it preaches, be mild and placid; should allure rather than astonish, persuade rather than terrify; that it should be like the serene summer evening, in which the soul aspires, in the influence of hope, and in the contemplation of mercy; that it should leave to superstition her lightnings and her tempests; to say to fear, " be thou my chief and grand ally,

" And men shall know thee by the throbbing heart,
When thy dark power inspires each thrilling line,
Since, though soft pity claim her mingled part,
All, all the thunders of the scene are thine."

I am jealous for the religious honour of the late century, and for England, when I hear you pronouncing the state of Christian oratory at the

commencement of the fourth, regal, and at that of the eighteenth meagre and impoverished. Unacquainted with those early polemic compositions, I am yet unwilling to suppose our treasures in that line less precious, though they may be less voluminous. Can these nominal saints of the olden time, with the later prelates of Rome's superstitious church, boast more energetic and luminous oratory than the pages of Warburton, Lowth, Newton, Watson, Beattie, Jennings, Horsley, Paley, and our young sacerdotal Marcellus, Fellowes, whose recent works are not born to die.—I have not mentioned Hurd, because I confess his frostism.

Then as sermon writers, what can be more animated, more irradiating to sceptic scruple, than the sermons of Sherlock? Seed's glow with the fire of genius, and the earnest eloquence of self-conviction. Sterne's are dramatic, touching, pathetic. Ogden's are solemn, startling, convincing. Blair's are exquisite. Imagination twines her richest, yet chastest flowers around the golden chains of his reasoning; which, uniting piety and morality, avoids the perplexing themes of mysticism, whose repose is the best interest of Christianity, whose sacred veil it is at once useless and rash to put aside. I am no great reader of sermons, and these are the chief compositions

of that name which I have considered; but doubtless there are many others equally able; and, rich as is the oratoric cream which you have skimmed for us from the Bishop of Meaux, I should not fear being empowered to produce extracts from the sermons I have mentioned, that would contain eloquence vivid and impressive as animates those which you have given us from the French prelate. Permit me also to observe, that I have not unfrequently witnessed triumphs of English pulpit-oratory in the rapt attention, the starting, and often streaming tears of the congregation, decided as those recorded by the vanity of Gregory Nazianzen. However founded in truth, such boastful egotism, in any English preacher, would extremely disgust his audience.

LETTER LIII.

Rev. R. Fellowes.

Lichfield, July 1, 1800.

There is no longer any wonder that the Critical Review should praise that obscure fustian epic, Gabor, since I learn from you that the au-

thor and the critic are one person. It has long been understood that —— is the reviewer of new poetry in that publication. I have been told that he has considerable talents and learning. Gabor is no proof of the first, since to think clearly is inseparable from great strength of intellect; though we often see scholastic knowledge exist in a mind where the lights of imagination, if they shine at all, shine but by glimpses, and where the judgment is wholly opake.

I am charmed with your analysis of the design and execution, the characteristic powers, and the moral, of that grand fabulous novel St Leon. Candid and charitable is your pious hope for its most extraordinary author. May it be accomplished!

Is there not a striking warning given against national and religious prejudices in the plausibility and apparent strength of the arguments put into the mouth of the grand inquisitor, at Madrid, in favour of that horrible institution? It was by similar reasoning that the late divorce bill was defended, viz. that cruelty to the individual was mercy to the community. So pleaded Gardner and Bonner to the bigot queen, to induce her to light her pyres. So will they always plead who love judgment better than mercy. They are all, however, ready to wish the preference reversed

at the Great Tribunal at which themselves must stand; yet, could that one individual of the universe be excepted, I am afraid they would wish the final edict of their God relentless as their own.

I have at length procured the Farmer's Boy, for which I had impatiently waited. The praise, with which it has been honoured from your pen, much more than the boasting odd preface, raised my expectations too high. Doubtless this poem is another miracle, added to many which the last century has produced, of native poetic talent, bursting through the clouds of penury, obscurity, and wholly uncultured education. But Bloomfield stands on no level of poetic ability with Chatterton or Burns, perhaps even with Yearsley. The Farmer's Boy certainly contains a succession of pleasing natural pictures of pastoral life; vital, because they are not drawn from bookish memory, or from imagination, but from nature, and the real habits of the author's station and experience; but to my ear the numbers are often inharmonious, and sometimes, while the images are simple, the expression is hard and bombastic, thus,

"And dirt usurps the empire of his shoes."

—The empire of a farmer's boy's shoes!

> " Unrivall'd stands thy country cheese, O Giles,
> Whose very name alone engenders smiles;"

Again,

> " Where grandeur revels in unbounded stores,
> Restraint, a slighted stranger at their doors."

The landscape of the vale of Euston has no appropriation, and without appropriation what is poetic landscape worth, if no feature of the scene is brought strongly to the eye? We are told there are woods and groves rising in solemn grandeur—so there are in the domain of every nobleman; but there are kites, and pheasants, and foxes at Euston!—'Good lack,' are there indeed?

I like the autumn and winter of the Farmer's Boy better than its spring and summer. In the former, the hogs in the wood, feeding on fallen acorns; their gregarious habits and customs; the rush-grown pool, the haunt of the lonely wild-duck; her sudden and startled flight from the reeds, and the pig-perturbation it caused; these form an interesting and vivid scene, new on the poetic page. It is in the manner of Teniers in the painter's school.

Then, with the field-hut; its prepared boyish sports; the disappointment, and the philosophic

reflections on what constitutes imprisonment; with all these verses I am much pleased; and with one of the lines I am charmed:

"And strolls the Crusoe of the lonely fields."

Besides that line, there is only one couplet of the whole composition which impressed me strongly enough to remain on my memory. It is in the description of the thunder-storm in the night; and the lines are admirable.

"The farmer wakes, and sees, with silent dread,
The angry shafts of Heaven gleam round his bed."

That appears to my eye the only *very* strong poetic ray which illuminates this pleasing, but, surely, not very fine poem. That masterly couplet excepted, who that recollects Thomson's or Chatterton's still grander description of a thunder-storm, can think very highly of this in the Farmer's Boy? Behold Chatterton's Thunder-storm.

"The sun was gleaming in the midst of day,
Dead was the air, and all the welkin blue,
When from the south arose, in drear array,
An heap of sable clouds, of sullen hue,
And their dark train on towards the woodland drew;
Shrouding, at once, the sun's delightful face,
And the black tempest swell'd and gathered round apace.

The gather'd storm is ripe;—the big drops fall,
The sun-burnt meadows smoke, and drink the rain.
Th' approaching ghastliness the herd appal,
And the full flock are driving o'er the plain.
Dash'd from the clouds the waters fall amain;
The horizon gapes!—the yellow lightning flies,
And the hot fiery steam in the wide flashing dies.

Hark! how the sullen thunder's grumbling sound
Comes slowly on, and then, loud rattling, clangs,
Shakes the high spire; and still, though spent and drown'd,
Upon the shrinking ear of terror hangs.
The winds are up, trees writhing as in pangs;
Again the lightnings flash, the thunder roars,
And from the full clouds burst the pattering stony showers."

Bloomfield's description of hay-making, reminds me of one in a juvenile poem of mine. I am tempted to insert a part of it here*.

On page 68th of the Farmer's Boy, there is a strangely mistaken epithet—thus: "In earliest hour of dark unhooded morn." A dark morn is *hooded*, not *unhooded*. Of such a morning Milton says,—

"Kerchief'd in a comely cloud,
While rocking winds are piping loud."

Coz White has lately, he tells me, enjoyed the

* See the first volume of the author's poems, lately published by Mr Scott.

happiness of your society, and the honour of an introduction, through you, to Dr Parr. Oh, envied, Attic hours! Adieu!

LETTER LIV.

William Hayley, Esq.

Lichfield, July 9, 1800.

Ah, honoured friend, tidings of your filial deprivation reached me at Buxton. Prepared as I was for the event, I, shuddering, lamented the extinction of your dearest hope. Be assured of my true sympathy. It is all that helpless friendship can rationally offer. Time and intellectual exertion have balms in store for even such wounds, deep as they are; but the trite arguments of consolation have them not to infuse.

And now, turning from a sad and hopeless theme, permit the expression of my fervent thanks for the too generous present of your new poem. For your interest's sake, I had rather you should have abstained from every present of a work so expensive, which I should gladly have purchased the instant I knew it was published. My grati-

tude had been earlier avowed, had I not been ill since it arrived; a fortnight's prisoner within doors, beneath cloudless skies, nor yet emancipated in these hours of bloom.

The Epistles on Sculpture admirably widen the circle of your Encyclopedian Muse, which enriches the literary fane of Britain with poetic celebration of the arts and sciences; traces their progress, and recals the just claims of their professors from the oblivious shadows of time.

I hope you will proceed to the future consummation of your avowed purpose; that sorrow, which spreads so dense a veil upon your hopes and affections,

> " Will yet be found all powerless to eraze
> Those shadowy forms, whose every precious trace
> By science hoarded, and to fancy dear,
> The muses, with expecting smile, revere,
> While yet in genius' plastic soul they rest,
> Folded, like future gems, in nature's breast*."

And will you pardon me if true solicitude for your future fame, induces me to hint my wish, that when this meditated composition shall be rising under your hands, you would pay more attention to the too frequent recurrence of certain

* Epistles on Sculpture.

epithets? With you, who have such perfect command of language, it must be owing to carelessness merely, that the words *dear*, *fond*, *sweet*, are so very often repeated in the rich poem before me. Envy, which delights in calling the notice of the public to the smallest specks on poetic snow, will perhaps be busy on this subject in the reviews. You might as well sweep these little sticks and straws from the polished surface of your verse, since the trouble of doing it is trifling.

Forgive me also, if I express my jealousy for our matchless Shakespeare, beneath my observance of your silence respecting him, when you combat the envious, arrogant, and unjust assertion of Montesquieu and Winckleman, "that the English labour under a natural incapacity to excel in the fine arts." You oppose, singly, the instance of Milton. Shakespeare and Milton are names that were never before divided, when an enlightened Englishman boasts, with patriotic exultation, of the poetic glory of his country.

Milton, great as he was, is surely not the greatest English poet, since he divides the palm of excellence with Homer; while the thinly-peopled stage, and comparatively cold declamation of the Athenian and Greek drama, leave Sophocles, Æschylus, and Euripides no pretence to share the meed of

surpassing greatness with the bard of Avon;—and if not they, how much less the Corneille and Racine of France, or the vaunted Schiller and Kotzebue of Germany!—while, in the late century, England has produced poets, in every style, that eclipse, in originality and grandeur, the united poetic strength of the whole Continent.

More than I can express, do I honour and admire the frequent testimony borne in this your poem, and in its learned and instructive notes, against the sanguinary spirit which has disgraced this reign; which cost us the Western Empire, and which has since diffused so vast a portion of needless death and anguish over the globe. The firm, yet temperate manner in which you censure the lust of war, in this composition, is worthy of your benevolence, your genius, and your judgment. Your lost friend Cowper's assertion,—

> "War is a game which, were their subjects wise,
> King's could not play at,"

should be engraven on every heart, together with your own impressive exclamation,—

> "War, whence the worst of human misery springs,
> The people's folly, and the guilt of kings."

It would be intruding too much on your time,

were I to point out the various passages which stand prominent on my admiration in the course of this poem and its notes. Yet I may not omit to mention, amongst those, the eighteen lines in the second epistle, which begin, "As death-like clay;" and also, in the third epistle, that passage of twenty-two lines, which begins, "Ye Rhodians."

The latter forms an animated and beautiful sentimental apostrophe to genuine liberty, nobly springing from the description of the fallen Colossus. Finely does it enliven the course of historic and didactic poetry. An equally happy effect, though in a different manner, is produced by the episode of Icarius, Ulysses, and Penelope. It is a lovely subject for an historic group on canvas.

I am charmed with your candid and eloquent vindication of the fame of Dædalus; and I am most feelingly interested by every tender mention of your suffering darling. It is thus that you have signed his, alas! early apotheosis.

I condole with you also on the loss of your beloved friend, Cowper. It is a public as well as private loss, that, instead of his emerging, as was hoped, into intellectual light and exertion, his sun is forever set. The preceding eclipse of his mind, through several years, is one of the mighty

mischiefs of the fanatic principles, which, from the eloquence and the private virtues of three able writers, have attracted so much attention, and obtained so much indiscriminate praise. By those principles was our great moral poet, so lately vanished, induced to attempt to blast, and wither at the very root, that meed of national applause to which intellectual exertion looks for its reward:

> "That joys to think its efforts may create
> Existence far beyond the common date,
> His wealth of mind to lasting ages give,
> And in futurity's affection live*."

Mr Cowper, whatever private friendship he might have had for Mr Hayley, must, from his avowed principles, together with Mr Gisborne, and all of that school, have surveyed the warm devotion of his muse to the exertions of genius, with the sort of eyes with which, in Godwin's sublimely fabulous novel, Bethlem Gabor looked upon the benevolent exertions of St Leon in Hungary.

I remain, my dear bard, &c.

* Hayley's Essays on History.—S.

LETTER LV.

Earl of Carlisle.

Lichfield, July 17, 1800.

My Lord,—I am honoured and obliged by the present of your Lordship's play*; and prefer the hazard of being thought obtrusive to that of seeming ungrateful.

It gratifies me to see this tragedy written in the Shakespearean school as to style; and in the intermixture of wit and humour in the dialogue, and of the grotesque with the elevated in the characters. Such blending, by whatever name of barbarous or Gothic it may be stigmatized, gives that ease and spirit which are strangers to the declamatory and solemn coldness of modern tragedy. The lighter traits, by contrasting those of pathos and horror, increase their force.

Dryden's opinion veered on more than one subject of dramatic criticism. Your Lordship knows he not only sanctioned, by his practice, that monstrous production, a tragedy in rhyme, but de-

* The Stepmother.—*S.*

fended its adoption, which perpetually betrayed him into ludicrous bombast where he meant to be impassioned.

Except to the pedant, names are little, Grecian, Gothic, or Gallic. That mixture of the comic and serious in tragedy, which Dryden condemns, against his own example, as Gothic, is justified by more infallible tests than his taste or decision, learned and ingenious as he was; by the practice of the so much superior Shakespeare—by Johnson's able defence of that practice, in his edition of those peerless dramas; by the construction of the human mind, and by the natural course of circumstances and events. The drama, whether serious or comic, affecting to be the mirror of human existence, is most excellent when most faithful to its design, excepting that measure, though not rhyme, is essential to the true dignity of the tragic muse. A tragedy in prose, is that nearer approximation to life, which we find in wax-work compared with fine painting. Yet who prefers the substantial to the shadowy representation? Mrs Wright's men and women to the portraits of Reynolds and Romney? George Barnwell to the Merchant of Venice?

Since life is a motley texture of mirth and sorrow, rudeness and refinement, elevation and debasement, the judicious introduction of those

varieties, as well as of the broader opposites of vice and virtue, best produces that first dramatic excellence, fidelity to nature.

Will your Lordship allow me a yet extended trespass upon your patience, while I advert to the passages in the play which stand most prominent on my approbation: the speech of the Countess on the 16th page, beginning, "You much mistake me,"—Isabella's comment upon it—The soliloquy of Casimir in the gallery.—It is poetic, it is Shakespearean. Also the Count's second audible meditation—"Yet to resign her;"—it breathes the genuine feelings of an heart, in which enamoured passion is the Aaron's rod. Lord Henry's description of the guilt-created phantom, is new and sublime; the abbot's basis of education admirable. Such sentiments render the drama a potent vehicle of virtuous impressions. From their unexpected occurrence, they sink deeper into the mind than do congenial axioms from the pulpit. So true is it, not only that a verse may, but that a verse often will, catch him who flies a sermon. Frederic's jealousy is stimulated with great dramatic art—and of high poetic beauty is Lord Henry's speech, commencing at the bottom of the 76th page; so also Louisa's nocturnal soliloquy, viz.

> " The evening's cold and dreary; the dull clouds
> Cling to the mountain's brow."

We see, we feel the scene. A judicious, that is, not too lavish introduction of scenic-painting into dramatic composition, has an infinitely fine effect:

> ———" Light thickens, and the crow
> Makes wing to th' rocking wood!"

In all the editions, *rocking* is written *rooky* wood. The unmeaning epithet passes unscrutinized by Warburton and Johnson, though supposed to have descended from that pen, from which scarcely one has descended which does not picture the substantive, or, at least, strengthen it. A transcriber might easily mistake *rocking* for *rooky*— but criticism ought to suspect his fidelity, rather than the poet of a pleonasm so notorious. A rook being only a larger species of crow, it would not be much worse writing to say, the crow makes wing to th' *crowy* wood. The doubtless real adjective intended was *rocking*, which, making the night stormy, increases the horror.

Another fine effect of interest in the speaker's situation, increased by scenic trait, is in the expressed despair of Varanes, in Lee's Theodosius,

during the midnight nuptials of his rival. In that instance we forgive, we even forget, the rhymes, from that sympathetic gloom of spirit which imagery, thus solemn, inspires. I have often thought that English poetry has scarce any thing more impressive, more simply grand, more chillingly awful, than the second couplet of the passage to which I allude—thus:

> "Lean wolves forget to howl at night's pale noon,
> And yelping curs bark at the silent moon."

The prologue to the Stepmother is extremely well written. It has taken Johnson's counsel, to catch the *aura popularis*, from whatever point it may blow. Nor less happy is the epilogue, in its censure of that immoral tendency which prevails in the German plays. What idiot mania, to forsake our Shakespeare for them!

I have the honour to remain, with high esteem, my Lord, your Lordship's, &c.

LETTER LVI.

CHARLES SIMPSON, ESQ.

Lichfield, Aug. 30, 1800.

I CONGRATULATE you, my long valued friend, on your marriage, and also your amiable bride. There are some things which we receive upon implicit trust, and the merit of her who could be your choice is one of *my* implicits.

Your little wedding present was very kind, and I thank you for the distinction. May the happiness of this union prove unclouded as was the day on which you plighted your vows, till age and inevitable infirmities must a little dull and deaden its glow.

I have lately read a curious book, recently published, Dunster on the subject of Joshua Sylvester's translation of the French poet, Du Bartas. It recals this translation from the oblivion into which the alternate turgidness, and quaint affectation of its phraseology, and Dryden's contemptuous satire, had combined to place it. Its subject, the creation—the first pair—their temptation and fall, with other of the Scripture traditions. The

translation is avowedly bold and paraphrastic, and first appeared when Milton was only eight years old.

The above mentioned book treats of this work, giving large extracts to support its author's conviction, that Milton made plenteous use of its crude materials, and it sufficiently impresses that conviction upon the mind of all its unprejudiced readers.

Strange and rugged are these materials—careless even of quantity in the measures—with rhymes continually doubled in one line, in this way,—"And pleasures in his treasures gaily found,"—till the couplets rattle and jingle like untuned bells; metaphors frequently hard and obscure; imagery as frequently distorted and violent—interspersed with allusions absolutely farcical.

Yet is this chaos almost as often illuminated by strong flashes of genius. Impersonization, at times, as grand as it is bold, and now and then an highly musical couplet, as if a throstle were to sing, at intervals of silence from the general chatter of jays, cuckoos, and sparrows. This is one of them, though, quoted from memory, it may not be quite in the first line exact—but of the second line I am certain. Speaking of the spontaneous production of the Edenic Garden:

> " And there was given, whate'er boon nature yields,
> Seedless and artless over all the fields."

But still this translation might fail to create powerful interest in the readers, did we not indisputably find in it the *prima stamina* of the Paradise Lost; the manner of treating that Scriptural story; its sentiments sometimes through whole passages; its imagery in several instances; its epithets very often.

Nor only in Paradise Lost, but in Milton's lesser poems, we find thoughts, pictures, and phrases, adopted from Sylvester, since the resemblance sets aside, in its nearness, all possibility of coincidence. Whether they are to be found in Du Bartas, or were the offspring of the translator's paraphrastic licence, it might be curious to inquire. The editor of this comparative volume is silent on that head.

The wonder seems, that this well-head of so many of the streams which constituted our vast and noble poetic river, has only now been discovered; that Dryden, who, to have satirized Sylvester, must have looked into him, and who was known to have felt some jealousy of the fame of Milton, was not aware how greatly he had been indebted, either to Du Bartas, or to his translator.

If he had been aware of it, the lettered world would have loudly heard of the plagiary.

Mr T. Warton could not have read Sylvester's translation, or he would have shewn us in his admirable edition of Milton's lesser poems, which traces their imitations to so many sources, that the grand Cerberian, and midnight-cave scenery, which opens L'Allegro, is entirely from Sylvester's Du Bartas. He does mention, upon the authority of Mr Bowle, that Il Penseroso's first lines are formed from a distich in Sylvester, thus,

> " Hence, hence false pleasures, momentary joys,
> Mock us no more with your illuding toys;"

but this resemblance is shadowy and immaterial, compared to that in the opening of L'Allegro. Mr T. Warton mentions also, on the same authority, Milton's " Hide me from day's garish eye," that Sylvester has " From day's glorious eye;" but that might very well be coincidence, or, if a plagiarism, it might be from others as well as from Sylvester, since Shakespeare calls the sun " The beauteous eye of heaven;" and a still older poet, Browne, in his Pastorals, says,

> " While that the day's sole eye doth gild the seas."

However, with Milton's juvenile poetry it is probable that Dryden was but little, if at all acquainted, since he has made no mention of it through all his * voluminious dissertations upon English verse, except by the bold injustice of asserting, that Milton wrote his Paradise Lost in blank verse because he had not the talent of writing in rhyme; that he had neither its ease nor its graces†. Yet surely no rhymes of Dryden's, great master though he was, are so eminently sweet, easy, and spirited as those of L'Allegro, Il Penseroso, or more melodious than those of the wildly-beautiful Lycidas.

Inconceivable, yet true, that with all their high and fascinating claims, the juvenilia of Milton's muse had sunk from public notice beneath the tasteless neglect and contempt of the poets and literati during an interval of seventy years, which involved a longer date than that part of Dryden's existence which succeeded to its publication. Professional critics ought never to be trusted, though they attain almost boundless trust, and even contemporary genius is too seldom just to the claims of its rivals; so that between both the pin-faith multitude, which never thinks for

* See the four large octavo volumes by Malone of Dryden's prose works.—*S.*

† See third volume of Malone's Dryden, p. 98.—*S.*

itself, is blinded. Even the aged Milton called the young and rising Dryden, the man of rhyme, in derision; and Dryden denied the claim of the Paradise Lost to be called an epic poem, and placed Ben Johnson upon an higher eminence than Shakespeare; while the other critics of that day impudently asserted, that the power of writing dramas expired with that writer, though Shakespeare and Fletcher remained, and wrote long after his death.

After all, I confess it mortifies me that our great epic poet, whose palms are illustrious as the Homeric laurels, should be thus obviously indebted not only to Homer and Dante in the Paradise Lost, and in his Juvenile poetry, to Drayton, Brown, and Fletcher, but also, in both his great and lesser works, to a Gallic poet, and his translator, neither of whom possessed, nor, on a balance of their beauties and defects, deserved to possess the high esteem of their country. Adieu!

LETTER LVII.

THOMAS PARK, ESQ.

Lichfield, Sept. 25, 1800.

I HAVE an immense deal to say to you, and therefore will not waste my time in apologies for the length of my involuntary silence.

Mrs Park's complaints are unquestionably nervous. Proteus-like, they assume, in turn, the form of various diseases; yet, with all their teasing versatility, and harrassing obstinacy, they are not esteemed dangerous.

To have seen you both beneath my roof this tropical summer, and in tolerable health and spirits, would have given me lively pleasure. From the different aspect of my apartments, and the luxuriant umbrage of my lawns and terrace, the over-fervid sun could not have smote us with his beams. I shall be glad to learn that no accumulation of malady resulted to either of you from the long duration of the skiey ardours.

It is nine years since I passed the three summer months at home. Imperious malady has always expelled me my little Eden, and driven me to the

coast in the month of July. I felt very cross and Eveish to leave my scene in the season of light and bloom; and thus compelled, as I was, to seek the Buxton fountain early in the spring, I ventured to omit my coast-expedition this year.

The decided pre-eminence you challenge for Cowper, over all his contemporary bards, stimulates me considerably. Highly as I deem of his genius, I by no means think it unequalled in his day. The superior popularity of the Task over any verse-composition of its period, must be acknowledged; but it is accountable from other causes than poetic pre-eminence; viz. its possessing sufficient merit to render it very dear to far the greater part of the discerning few, while it is intelligible and interesting to the undiscerning many. That is not so with some of our noblest poetry, which must be confessed very superior to the Task—as Paradise Lost, Comus, Lycidas, and Gray's two matchless odes, and his Descent of Odin. Yet not any of those compositions, had they been coeval with the Task, would have had the least chance with it as to attaining speedy popularity. Therefore is it, that speedy popularity, however genuine and independent of review, magazine, and newspaper puffing, is no test of pre-eminence; though, when thus genuine, it remains a proof of considerable merit. The superior

works I have mentioned, are all of much too coy grace, and abstracted sublimity, to be really felt, and sincerely admired by the common reader, who may yet be truly susceptible of the beauties of such a poem as the Task. Those readers will, however, be clamorous in applauding works, though above the reach of their conceptions, which have, by the slowly accumulating suffrages of the enlightened few, obtained high and established reputation.

Then Cowper's Task, with no inconsiderable portion of true genius and estimable sentiments, is not only level with their capacities, but gratifies the two most general and nurtured feelings of the human mind; its enthusiasm concerning the Deity, and its malice to its fellow-creatures. The sombre piety of that poem gratifies the first, and its severe moral satire, and, on some occasions, most ungenerous and unjust satire, pampers the second; while the winter's walk, the winter evening, the post-boy, the newspaper, the tea-table,— all sweetly touched and described, will delight thousands, who would feel no thrill of impressive feeling in the augustly horrible Pandemonium of Milton,— who would be ennuied in his Eden, and puzzled and bewildered in the wild-wood of his enchanter, and by the wizard streams of his Deva.

Let it be remembered, that Cowper's compositions in *rhyme*, whatever strength of thought may be found in them, have no poetic witchery, either of imagery, landscape, or numbers; that Crowe's "Lewesdon Hill, though its subject is less amusingly desultory than that of the Task, may yet, as a work of genius, challenge the finest parts of Cowper's poem.

Let it be remembered how variously, and how beautifully Hayley has written; though I confess his genius seems rapidly to have declined from its meridian, since that noble poem, the Essay on Epic Poetry, appeared. Of this decline I am afraid you will think, and that it will be generally thought, his late work, Epistles on Sculpture, is another proof; though it has many beauties, and though much learned information on the subject is contained in the notes. He was so good to send it me. You will there see, or have already seen, how passionately he deplores his lost protegé; and that he there gives him his own name, confirming the public surmise that he was his son; but, if it really was so, he either chose to deceive me on the subject, or I strangely misunderstood him, when I was his guest at Eartham, in the summer 1782, when this youth was an infant, not two years old, and whose real father I understood to be the gallant young Howel, a

former adoption of Mr Hayley's, who was lost on his return from the West Indies.

But to resume our subject. Recollect the flood of picturesque imagination, which, in richly harmonious verse, Darwin has poured over the discoveries and systems of philosophic science; how original, how true to nature, and how vivid his pictures of the animal and vegetable world!—how appropriate, how varied, how exquisite his landscapes!—what entertaining and poetic use he has made of the most remarkable occurrences of the late century! I deeply feel that of the first poetic excellence, invention, there is an immensely transcending portion in Darwin's Botanic Garden to what can be found in the Task.

Cowper is the poetic son of Dr Young. More equal, more consistent, more judicious, far less uniformly sombre than his parent,—but also much less frequently sublime. Darwin has no parent amongst the English poets; he sprung, in his declining years, with all the strength and fancy of juvenile life, from the temples of an immortal muse, like Pallas from the head of Jove.

Nor should it be forgotten, that Coleridge's Ode to the Departing Year is sublimer throughout than any part of Cowper's Task; that the stripling, Southey, has written an epic poem, full of strength as to idea, and grandeur as to imagery;

that both those writers, in their rhyme-productions, far outshine Cowper's prosaic couplets.

When these claims are made, without mentioning the various and charming Mason, since his poetic sun was setting when Cowper's rose— when they are poized in the scale, surely you will resign your Colossal claim for the muse of Cowper, destined as she is to immortal remembrance. That destiny I asserted for her to Dr Darwin, and Sir Brooke Boothby, ten years ago, when I heard them decide that the Task was too prosaic to survive its century, and that they could not read it through.

And now, what shall I say to you on the subject of Miss Bannerman's volume? Long as my letter already is, I feel that I have much to add on the subject, to justify my utter dissent from you on that theme. Dr A.'s lavish praise of powers, which appear to me of such strutting feebleness, surprises me much less than yours, since he pronounced the prosaic and long defunct Leonidas a fine epic poem.

In the first place, you style Miss B. pre-eminent as a Scotish poetess. Ah! have you forgotten Helen Williams and her Peru, published when she was under twenty? I confess an epic poem was too arduous an attempt for years so blossoming, an unclassic education, and inexperience in criti-

cism. Peru, consequently, wants strength, and a sufficient portion of characteristic variety, and its metaphors and epithets are sometimes incongruous; but the numbers are richly harmonious, the landscapes vivid, and the fancy wildly and luxuriantly elegant.

Have you forgotten, also, that Miss Baillie, just emerged as the acknowledged author of the Plays on the Passions, is a Scotish woman; and, in my estimation, if indeed they are her's, as nobody now seems to doubt, a very great poet. Whatever may be the faults of her two tragedies, poetic strength and beauty are to be found in them, which place her in the first rank of those who, in this period, have struck the Delphic lyre. No plays, except Jephson's, approach Shakespeare's so nearly.

Surely that obscurity, which Burke pronounces a source of the sublime, is totally different in its nature to the strained and abortive conceptions of Miss Bannerman's pen! The obscurity he means, is where sentiment is rather hinted than expressed; and, to an intelligent mind, conveys a different meaning to that which the words simply bear.

Certainly an author is not obliged to find his reader brains; but that obscurity which puzzles a reader, who has poetic sensibility and taste, to

guess what the author means, is a great inexpiable fault; and if it occurs frequently, is as sure a proof of weakness in the powers of composition, as the former species is of strength.

There are other things, as you well know, which may render poetry obscure to the prosers, without fault in the composer;—as inversions, using epithets as verbs-active, or as noun-substantives, together with the bold and graceful omission of the conjunctives.

But the palpable obscure in which Miss B.'s ideas are perpetually struggling, is not the result of the poetic licenses, any more than of that mode of expression, which purposely leaves something to be supplied by the imagination of the reader. Unquestionably she has a good ear for the construction of numbers; her lines flow tunefully. Flowing numbers are, however, but the drapery of poetry, valuable when they clothe clear and vigorous thoughts and striking imagery; but worth little when they enrobe such blown and empty conceptions as I find on the pages of Miss B.

You speak of the wildness of her fancy,—it seems to me elaborate, yet incomprehensible, inflated, yet trite; and, if I know what invention is, that prime essential in poetry, she has absolutely none. Therefore is it, that no time, no

instruction, no experience, will make her a poet, though her command of numbers tolerably qualifies her for a translator; not of that class, however, which rise upon their originals.

I will take an early opportunity of shewing you the ground of these my convictions. Meantime, I remain, &c.

LETTER LVIII.

REV. R. FELLOWES.

Lichfield, Sept. 27, 1800.

IN my mind and my heart there must be more deficiency than I hope belongs to them, if I could have been willingly silent, through many weeks, to a letter of so much ingenious and philosophic spirit as this before me. Accuse my stars, on this subject, if you please, but acquit my heart.

I thank you for the beautiful and just disquisition in your last, on the irrationality and the mischiefs of Calvinism; but am surprised to see you confess, that you can hardly regret its morose and reasonless prevalence in the mind of Cowper. You add, "If the Task owes some of its defects

to the prevalence of that illiberal principle, it is perhaps indebted to it for more of its beauties, even to that spirit of dejection, which saddened his heart beyond the usual tone of human sadness, and gave an enthusiastic sublimity to his sensations, beyond the common soarings of mortal enthusiasm. Some passages in his Task, of deep-woven gloom, are almost too much for my feelings. So forcibly do they express the state of his heart at the time he wrote them, as to overpower me with concern, and sympathy, and admiration."

Ah, when you said you could scarcely regret that bias in Cowper, you forgot, surely, how dear it had cost him;—that it induced him, at length, during the course of many years, to believe himself an outcast from the mercies of his God; that it overwhelmed all his powers of intellectual exertion, and left them a dismal wreck. That internal misery was, however, an after consequence. In his narrow and bigotted satire on human praise, in the sixth book of the Task, I perceived the dark seeds of fanaticism sown, and feared they would, in time, produce bitter fruits, deadly to the peace of his heart.

But, during the composition of the Task, they had only choked his generosity respecting the no-

ble enthusiasm of just applause; they had not then shed their envenomed dews on his bosom-tranquillity.

Surely your late perusal of Cowper's Task was beneath a consciousness of the miserable state into which the mind of its author had since sunk, and you have attributed the sensations of pity and concern, which remained for him in your heart, to those apprehended effusions of wretchedness in the poem, which I cannot perceive that it breathes, even in the slightest degree.

No composition can breathe more inward self-content. Cowper's egotism, in this his great work, is all happiness. How cheerily, through the first book, does he rejoice in that corporal health, and vigour, which enabled him to taste abroad, and widely explore the scenic beauties, through every change of climate and season! We see him exulting in his tender friendship for Mrs Unwin, with whom he lived. He paints its delights in such affectionate terms, as induced me long to believe him a married man. The softest calm of heart breathes through those lovely descriptions, when he rejoices in

> "The air salubrious of the lofty hills,
> The cheering fragrance of the dewy vales,
> And music of the woods."

So, also, in the passage, book the third, which commences

> " How various his employments, whom the world
> Calls idle," &c.

And, in the ensuing one, which begins,

> " The morning finds the self-sequester'd man
> Fresh for his task, intend what task he may."

Indeed, through the whole of that book, he paints his daily employments with serene gladness, and, in the fulness of its impression, asks

> " What can I wish that I possess not here?
> Health, leisure, means to improve it, friendship, peace,
> And constant occupation, without care."

In the fourth book, domestic pleasures glow through his winter evening. The twilight hour, in which he amuses himself with the alternate brightening and deadening fire, producing odd shadows on the ceiling; and, with the ludicrous figures in the red cinders, bespeak an heart at rest. Beneath impressions, deeply sombre, we may be soothed by vernal, by summer, and autumnal scenery; but tranquillity of spirit is necessary to produce the serene pleasure which Cowper avows,

amid the gloom and devastation of winter, when he says,

> "How calm is my retreat! O how the frost,
> Raging abroad, and the rough wind, endear
> The silence and the warmth enjoy'd within!"

The contrast in those three lines reminds me of a passage in Dr Johnson's Tour to the Hebrides. As the rage of the elements is here contrasted with the placid comforts, so, in Johnson's record of the laird's mansion in the Isle of Raasay, it is thus compared with festal enjoyment: "Raasay has little that can detain a traveller, except the laird and his family; but their power wants no auxiliaries. Such a seat of hospitality, amidst the winds and waters, fills the imagination with a delightful contrariety of images. Without is the rough ocean, and the rocky land, the beating billows, and the howling storm; within is plenty and elegance, beauty and gaiety, the song and the dance."

I trust you will now confess that I have justified, by proofs from the poem, my dissent from your opinion that the Task is indebted for its sublimities to a deep dejection of spirit in its author.

After a fortnight's residence with a friend in Warwickshire, I passed two days, on my return

home, at Birmingham, beneath the hospitable roof of Mr Edward Simpson. Distinguished were those days by the society of our illustrious friend Dr Parr. Your talents and virtues were more than once our theme. His eloquence did them not only brilliant but affectionate justice. It threw, on many other themes, and, above all, on the national ones, the strongest lights of reason and imagination.

On one only theme was he unjust; but that so flagrantly, so inconceivably!—Ah! it was to Gray, the first lyric bard the world has produced. Such a spot of heresy on such a sun as the mind of Dr Parr! Spot, did I say, an absolute eclipse.

From his superiority of genius, it is even more astonishing than the present dean* of Christchurch's assertion, viz. that of all, in every age and nation, who have aspired to the name of poet, only four deserve it: Homer, Dante, Ariosto, and Shakespeare.

Admiring and revering Dr Parr as I do, my concern on this subject kept pace with my wonder. It would have been idle in me to have disputed upon a point so indisputable; as idle as to have tried to convince a blind man of the reality of light, who, because he could not perceive it,

* Dr Jackson.—S.

denied its existence. From Dr Parr's equal abilities, and more liberal spirit, I hoped dispersion, and had no dread of augmentation of the Johnsonian clouds on the fame of our matchless lyrist.

The bitter pill of such a disappointment wanted gilding, and he did gild it; even by a kind promise to visit me, accompanied by you, in the course of the winter. Be willing, I pray you, to realize the plan!

LETTER LIX.

THOMAS PARK, ESQ.

Lichfield, Jan. 5, 1801.

WHEN you recollect what claims I have made for Dr Darwin, as the inventor of a new class in poetry; as an exquisite poetic painter, both in imagery and landscape; as investing philosophy, and all her sciences, with the brightest irradiations from the Delphic shrine; as master of the grandest harmonies of the heroic couplet;—remembering these, my claims for him, you will expect to hear me avow the utmost astonishment, that you should pronounce his great work,

"a shewy and short-lived garden," and Cowper's Task a noble orchard of winter-keeping fruit.

Allowing the last of your decisions, I utter my warm protest against the first. Have I lived to hear a gentleman, whose talents I respect so highly, admire Miss Bannerman's muse, and despise Dr Darwin's? I have no prejudice in favour of him, or against her. All who have known me through life, by conversation, as well as by pen, will testify, that I have been ever ready to acknowledge, and to applaud the talents which adorn my sex; have ever been tenacious of the fame of my accomplished sisters of the lyre, where I thought them well-founded. How must I be changed, if, as you say, I have indeed applied the scalping knife, and the tomahawk, on the fair form of real genius!

I disavow all partiality to Darwin. His conduct to me has not been calculated to inspire it. He has taken pleasure, from the time he commenced author himself, to depreciate my writings, which, till then, he had warmly praised. His taking my landscape of the valley he cultivated near Lichfield, written and published in my name, in the Gentleman's Magazine and Annual Register, before one line of his noble poem was written, and years before it came out; taking it, I say, and publishing it as the exordium of his

work, without the least acknowledgment, could have no tendency to produce in me an exaggerating spirit concerning his talents. But treatment, thus unhandsome, shall not induce me to suppress the fervour of my testimony in their favour, when they appear to me unjustly arraigned.

You add the injurious appellation of "frothy trifle" to your prophecy of speedy oblivion for the Botanic Garden, so deeply philosophic!—so extensively scientific!—so beautifully picturesque? You might term the Iliad a frothy trifle upon the same ground that you so censure Darwin's poem, viz. as containing little that is important to the interests of true religion or sound morality.

You accuse the Darwinian poetry of possessing no interest for the passions. Such interest had no natural connection with its subject, any more than it had with the Georgics of Virgil, the Metamorphoses of Ovid, or the Midsummer Night's Dream of Shakespeare; and passages of pathetic power, and of impressive morality, are not fewer in the Botanic Garden than in the other three. They are all distinguished, and all should alike be famous to remotest times, as beautiful creations of poetic fancy. Exquisite imagination has always been allowed the first of the poetic merits. Has Ovid lived through so many centuries, and "borne his blushing honours thick about

him," and shall our English Ovid, shall Darwin die?

If he is not a decidedly moral bard, his verse has no tendency to corrupt the mind. That is more than can be said for Ovid.

Whatever is highly excellent of its species, will not, cannot be short-lived. Rare as is good taste in that science, yes, more rare than genius, its suffrages will accumulate, however slowly, till they have placed excellence upon a rock of impregnable fame.

It is seldom, and only accidentally, that I see reviews or magazines. Mr White sent me lately one, of the existence of which I had not previously heard—the Historical Magazine for September last; and he sent it for its similarity of opinion to mine about Miss Bannerman's compositions. I transcribed its strictures on them, and also on Bloomfield; and shall copy them here, as I wish you to see them, without giving you the trouble to search them out.

"The Farmer's Boy, by R. Bloomfield, is not without vigorous lines, pleasing images, and natural sentiments. Considered as the production of a self-educated shoemaker's boy, it may excite surprise, and deserve a share of praise; but as poetry, viewed without regard to extrinsic circumstances, its merits are not high. In a real or af-

fected enthusiasm of false taste, it has been cried up as a divine effusion of transcendent genius; but it is hastening, nevertheless, to take its place in the lumber-room of oblivion, beside those of Stephen Duck, James Wodehouse, and Jones the bricklayer. It was by praise, such as Capel Loft has bestowed on this piece, that the friends of Ambrose Philips ruined the character of his Pastorals. To bestow praise in a manner thus indiscreet and tasteless, is treason to the rights of genius. To teach youth to admire bad models, is to oppose, in a manner the most mischievous, the genuine improvement of the poetic art.

"Of the same class as to merit, and the same fate as to tasteless applause, are the poems of Anne Bannerman. They are laboured imitations of the most vicious productions of the Della Crusca school. The lines are sounding;—one would almost think, at first sight, that it is *meaning* which meets the ear, but in vain shall you pause and strive to catch it. You find nothing but trite thoughts, disguised in a multitude of affected words; an ostentation of imagery, without one delicate picture fresh from nature; an affected cant of poetic feeling, without one effusion of genuine passion; a pretence of elevation and elasticity of fancy, yet nothing of that

wild, yet tempered enthusiasm of imagination, which diffuses over true poetry a delicious, inexpressible, and irresistible charm. Shame on those who thus encourage girls to make fools of themselves! Certain critics have exhibited, as proofs of Miss B——'s excellence in poetry, precisely those pieces which are the most obviously and indisputably nonsense."

With this critic I have no other affinity respecting the Farmer's Boy, than that it has been egregiously over-praised by its editor. It is a pleasing, interesting poem. Its author has looked at nature, if not with a rapt, yet with a very discriminating eye, and painted her justly, though in numbers often deficient in sweetness and flow, and with little of what is called the poetic heaven of invention. Yet still, still a work of genius,—the consideration of extrinsic circumstance set aside. Nothing can be more unjust than to rank it with the verses of Stephen Duck, Wodehouse, and Jones, or to predict for it a fate inevitably oblivious; though, I confess, the editor, by preferring for it unfounded claims, has done his utmost to procure that hot-bed reputation with the review-governed multitude, as always has a tendency to procure, after a short time, dismissal into the land where unfounded pretensions are irrevocably forgotten; and that, by exciting disgust in the minds of

the few, whose fiat confers lasting reputation. Such, however, will not, I think, be the fate of the Farmer's Boy. I trust it has a principle of vitality, which shall resist the disadvantage of being placed in a soil of reputation too luxuriant for its constitution. The lowest, rudest, and commonest objects of nature, painted so faithfully, and interspersed with the natural effusions of a feeling heart, and with some scenes and passages of yet higher poetic claims, will save it from the fate that periodical critic has predicted. Still greater injustice has he committed on the self-educated bard, by ranking his sensible, interesting, and unaffected worth, with the stilted abortions of Miss Bannerman's volume; upon which I do not think him too severe. But when shall we meet with review-criticism, which does not betray, by its inconsistence, its inability for the task it assumes? This gentleman allows, however grudgingly, that the Farmer's Boy has vigorous lines, pleasing images, and natural sentiments; but when, at the same time, and with equal truth, he denies everything that is vigorous, perspicuous, and natural, to the ravings of Miss B , yet places the two compositions on the same class as to merit, he betrays, most grossly, his own want of power to distinguish and to appreciate justly; without which power, criticism is that

worse thing than bad writing, which Pope pronounces it, when he says,

> "Of the two, least dangerous the offence,
> To tire our patience, than mislead our sense."

Even in the just condemnation of Miss B——'s talents, there is an apparent want of discrimination. He says, and truly, "that which at first sight looks like meaning, proves incomprehensible on examination;" and then immediately adds, "we find nothing but trite thoughts, disguised in a multitude of affected words." Now, thoughts which are trite can hardly be unintelligible. He should have said, what he truly might have said, all that is intelligible in Miss B——'s writings, is trite and borrowed. So far from finding nothing but what is trite, the most we find is composed of ideas so confused, incongruous, and abortive, that it is impossible to reconcile them to good sense, under any licence that poetry has ever obtained.

The same critic betrays, on the same page, his insensibility to the beauty of Darwin's muse—over-ornamented perhaps; but while the decorations are in themselves of high genuine magnificence, he is a callous censor who will not forgive their profusion.

I am surprised you should quote the British Critic's eulogium of Miss B——'s writings in their justification. You, who know my contempt for the poetic decisions of that publication, grounded upon the ignorance they displayed of English poetry, and its usages; by their censure of my application of the words *thrill*, and *idol*, and also by their assertion that Mr Polwheel had coined, and injudiciously coined, the words *memorize*, *slumbrous*, and *moontipt*, though the expressions, so stigmatized by them, both in my writings and Mr P.'s, are illustrated by Johnson with quotations from our best poets, who have used them in precisely the same sense. It is in character that such a critic should applaud Miss B. He that mistakes sense for nonsense, must be liable to mistake nonsense for sense. That is no wonder,—the miracle is that you can endure it.

I think Mr Nares very pleasant and animated as a companion. I am sure he has wit, and I presume he is a good scholar, in the common acceptation of the word. I hope, and trust also, that he is a very worthy man; but he has no prompt perception of genuine excellence in the poetic science, through the medium of his native language. He praises what has been long praised; but he was not born to lay the corner-stones

of that fame which true genius is destined to acquire.

I received Miss Bannerman's volume when Mr Nares was here, and asked him if he had seen it? "No."—Had heard of it? "No." I asked him if he chose to see it. "No," he replied; "it will be reviewed in our work by one of my coadjutors." Meantime, before he leaves Lichfield, or had seen a syllable of it, it is reviewed in the British Critic. The circumstance confirms my former belief, that Mr Nares himself has nothing to do with the strictures in the poetic censorship of that publication. Without much confidence in his critical powers, I yet hold him superior to the nonsense of every stricture on English verse which I have seen in the British Critic. To be sure that has been only three or four of the numbers, sufficiently sickened by them of the Gildon Mr Nares employs to decide on the claims of the British poets. I repeated to Mr Nares the passage from Miss B., about a syren-song being soft as the cry of an expiring mariner. He laughed very heartily, and exclaimed, What nonsense! I think he will be a little ashamed of his coadjutor's puffs of that lady, though, in policy, he will not confess the sensation. When he comes again, I shall rally and dose him well from the Genii. I have no doubt that you will soon be aware that you have

been spell-bound upon the subject, as was Mrs Piozzi about the fustian of her friend, Merry, and the rest of the Della Cruscan school.

At length the tales of wonder are before the public, and contain Scott's Glenfinlas, and the Eve of St John, which I mentioned to you with such warm applause; but I blush for the editor respecting his dishonest imposition on the public. Two volumes, of guinea-price, one of them stuffed with old things from Dryden, Mallet, Parnel, and Percy's volumes of ancient poetry, Hosier's Ghost, &c.—and, of the few which have not already repeatedly passed the press, very few, indeed, except the beautiful Cloud-King, and the humorous ones, can rank high as poetry. His tomb of Angantyr, as he calls it, is a miserable business. He must be a supreme coxcomb on that single testimony; but Scott's ballads are gems.

You say you fear, from the style of his Epistles on Oratory, and that egotism of melancholy, which so often occurs on their progress, that Mr Hayley is likely to become, like Cowper, the victim of morbid despondency. His sensibilities have certainly sustained a severe trial, in the long-protracted sufferings, and untimely death of that fondly beloved youth, in whom he had concentered his whole sum of affectionate connection.

The very recluse life he has led, and will continue to lead, has an unquestionable tendency to deepen the gloom of this heart-rending disappointment. Yet, I think, he will not sink under it. No!—his literary ardour will bear him up. You see, in the course of his last work, and its notes, that he was planning new poetic compositions, even while his griefs were all bleeding fresh. Time does everything for minds of that cast. He who can bewail his sorrows to the world, will not become their victim. There is a mournful luxury in such pains, which has nothing in it of the severity of despair. Mr Hayley will always love to deplore, and to allude to his lost darling in future compositions. Affliction never overturns the sanity of a spirit which it does not first render indolent. Never will he, like poor Cowper, become the victim of religious despondency: the darkest and most incurable of all irrational feeling. O! what pests of human peace are those, who seek to instil the misery systematically, converting to deadly poison the bread of life in the Gospel!

Lo, within these few days, another subject of amazement! I am become an absolute Katterfelto, and do nothing but wonder.—"Here is Godwin's tragedy," said a friend, the leaves uncut. "I leave it with you, wanting time to read it to-day. It was damned you know." I replied, "Yes; the

author's politics, and yet more, his justly censurable heterodoxy, probably blighted its reception on the boards—but it must be good. The characteristic strength, the depth of thought, the heart-grappling interest, and the terrible graces of Caleb Williams, and St Leon, will nobly support the tragic muse. Yes; they will revive her laurels, withered, and in the dust, since Jephson forsook her. Sheridan had restored their vigour and bloom, if, in a fit of idleness, he had not dipt them in the still pool of prose; because it was nearer at hand than the Heliconian fountain. Godwin has not done so."

O, my stars, what short-lived exultation! How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of genius blunted! Is Godwin superannuated, that he could endure such stuff, as he wrote it? Is he mad, to commit, by its publication, this suicide on his fame? Such blank verse, there is no reading it! It halts and hobbles worse than the prose of a cobler, or a tailor, turned Methodist preacher. The plot improbable, extravagant, and without interest;—the monarch a whiffling idiot, who knows not his own mind a single instant. The heroine, a silly inconsistent moppet, who breaks the vow she had made to her dying father, yet does not know she has done wrong; and then suffers herself to be bullied by a swaggering mad-

man, into breaking her vows to a faultless and doting husband. A pretty atonement, truly, for her first fault. Preferable, surely, is the meanest sock to such a buskin! Nor is there any redemption for the general worthlessness, in one or two fine passages, which might be selected. Adieu!

LETTER LX.

EDWARD JERNINGHAM, ESQ.

January 17, 1801.

I THANK you for having presented to me the second edition of your Essay on Pulpit Oratory, illustrated by extracts from Bossuet.

I find you not only considerably enlarged, but improved, from having strengthened your arraignment of our British style of sermon-writing, by some striking examples.

The censure passed upon our preachers for neglecting, or but coldly touching the awful themes of public calamity, is too well supported by the instance you give from Sprat; its echo from Calamy; the unimpressive use made by Stillingfleet

of that dreadful conflagration, when it was his appointed subject; and by the comment of South upon the conceited passage in Tillotson. But it is not from any of these first divines that I would wish to see rival passages selected, which might shine, not only with a chaster but with as warm a lustre as those of the French prelate.

I doubt not the justice of Melmoth's censure on the style of Tillotson, since neither my memory nor my heart ever retained a single impression from the few sermons of his, which have been forced upon my attention, except that of their tedious length and elaborate dulness. Immoderate length in a sermon is a fault which excellence itself cannot expiate.

Our great lyric poet Gray's general censure on the style of our preachers since the revolution, is strong and high corroboration of yours;—but the two stars of pulpit eloquence, Ogden and Blair, had not then appeared in our horizon.

Yet surely the matchless (by Bossuet at least matchless) close of one of Sherlock's Discourses, "Go to your natural religion," &c. is not, as you seem to think it is, a single flash of lightning, which renders the general darkness more visible; since luminous, forcible, and impassioned sentences are many on his pages, though perhaps not equal to that most resplendent passage that

ever adorned sacerdotal oratory in any age or any country.

St Chrysostom's reproach to the nuns of Antioch, for the style of their dress, is surely an exceptionable example of admonition. There appears to me more voluptuousness in *his* description of their attire, than in *their* attention to render it becoming. The present mode of dress in our young women of fashion, and *their* imitators, is, from its gross immodesty, a proper subject of grave rebuke from the preacher; but if that rebuke was to consist of description luxuriously minute as that of the Greek saint to his nuns, the audience would depart laughing at the monitor, who had so circumstantially displayed its effect upon his own imagination.

Strange indeed it is, and very amenable to your censure, that the preachers of eminence, whose sermons have gone down to posterity, and who lived at that awful period, when the destroying angel passed over this island, should not have noticed, or so slightly noticed, the anguish and desolations of that pestilential era.

A predecessor of my father's, in the rectory of the village of Eyam in Derbyshire, was worthy to have his name go down to posterity, with that of the Bishop of Marseilles, and the French dramatic poet, whom, to your own honour and his, you here

rescue from the overshadowing pinion of time. The enclosed extract will shew you the ground of Mr Mompessan's rival claim to the palms of Christian fortitude and kindness*.

I beg leave to recommend to your attention the contrast of the happy and unhappy parent, one in the virtue, the other in the vice of his children. It will be found in the close of Dr Ogden's elventh Sermon on the Commandments. Seldom has more touching eloquence met my observation, more calculated to penetrate the heart of youth, and to mould it to filial piety.

Nothing is more disgusting to me, and indeed to the generality of people, than dictatorial egotism from the pulpit. Even in the learned and aged clergyman, it is priestly arrogance. In the young declaimer it is insufferable presumption. There is too much of it in Bossuet. If the preacher censures, he ought to censure in his Master's name and authority, not in his own. Let him involve his own frailty in his charge of general depravity, and let him express a desire of self-amendment when he exhorts his brethren to forsake their sins. *We* and *us*, not the priest-proud *I*, ought to be the sign-personal in his language.

* See the first volume of Mr Scott's edition of Miss Seward's poetical works.

Let modesty and humility bridle his imagination; sincerity, truth, and paternal kindness, be the sources of his admonition, and then may he take your advice, and neglect no means of awakening the passions of his audience, with the marked calamities or signal blessings, which time past or present, circumstances local or general, may present to his subject.

Some fifteen years ago I wrote six sermons. Most of them have been preached. Without the congregation knowing that they were not his by whom they were delivered, I had the satisfaction of witnessing their attention and their tears.

You have mistaken me in supposing I meant to restrain either the pathos or the energy of pulpit eloquence, though I cannot think Bossuet a safe model, in all respects, for our young divines; or that his style would be acceptable from an English clergyman.

Entirely do I subscribe to your censure of Dryden's Annus Mirabilis. No writer of genius disgusts me half so often, both by sins of omission and commission in his poetry, and by eternal self-contradictions and false precepts in his criticisms.

It is the whim of this day to extol Dryden as the mighty Colossus of English rhyme, under whose huge legs his petty successors creep. "If

you must read English poetry," says the academic pedant, "study Dryden." Now, certainly a model, so often misshapen in its construction, so "smircht and smeared" with colloquial vulgarness; so often cold and affected, as in the Annus Mirabilis, and in many other poems, where the occasion demanded simple energy, is not, with all its great points, a proper study for youthful and rising genius. It is only when matured by familiarity with purer forms of poetic greatness, that its attention ought to anchor on the unequal pages of the often sublime, but much oftener groveling Dryden.

The high and public compliment you have paid to my pleas against your arraignment of our national preachers, does me honour, and I thank you for it. At present I am much out of health, but if I grow better, perhaps I may feel disposed to send my apology for them to some of our periodical tracts, if you permit me.

You have not, surely, taken it into your account, that it requires first-rate talents to execute your plan for the construction of sermons, well; and that, if ill-executed, the consequences, as to their effect on the human heart, would be much worse than that of those cold homilies, which are called good practical sermons; which, in general, do neither good nor harm. They, at least, escape

that ludicrous contempt, which every attempt to move the passions must create, made by those who do not know how to touch their springs.

Bossuet was a man of genius, so was Sherlock, so was Seed, so was Ogden, and so *was* Blair, for the newspapers inform me, "that his pure and glowing spirit hath aspired the clouds." Our existing clergy, of superior talents, preach very finely, and need not exchange their style for Bossuet's. I wish you could hear some of our pulpit-orators in this cathedral, for they are clear to convince, pathetic to persuade, and eloquent to charm.

The *amor patriæ* is fervid in my bosom. The superiority of English talents, in all the walks of genius, I proudly feel. The sons of the song, the pencil, and the lyre, support it more and more every day, and hour, and I burn to assert their claims whenever I see them questioned.

You have made excellent use of Mr Erskine's noble oration in defence of the Christian faith, against the impudent attacks of Paine; and on the virtues and intellectual powers of its great defenders, Newton, Boyle, Locke, Hale, and Milton. When I was at Buxton, in May last, I met with the Life of the late Dr Horne, Bishop of Norwich; and was beyond measure surprised to learn, from that tract, that the Bishop accused

Sir Isaac Newton of lurking infidelity; of having been secretly in league with the infidel writers of his day, to disgrace Christianity, and disprove its truth. The Bishop despises his planetary system, because it does not accord with the assertions of sacred history, or with the miracle recorded by Joshua, concerning the arrest of the sun and moon.

Have the goodness to present my grateful compliments to Lord Carlisle, and congratulations on Lord Morpeth's approaching nuptials with the lovely maid of the house of Cavendish, to which I am hereditarily attached, from reported virtues, and from political veneration. I remain, &c.

LETTER LXI.

REV. ED. ROBERTS of Dinbren, Wales.

Lichfield, Feb. 16, 1801.

IT is at once in my power to thank you for your last letter, and for the too costly present of the Dinbren landscapes, from the pencil of our British Claude. Beautiful they surely are, though I could have wished them of more identifying re-

semblance;—at least that which is meant to represent my darling scene, commanded by the seat on the terrace, which zones your hill.

Had I not previously known what I had to expect, I should not have recognized the view. Those rich vallies are annihilated, that, from the spot in which the Deva emerges on the sight, intervene between it and the terminating mountains. Alike in vain do we look for that fine object, the Valle Crucis ruins, which, in the real landscape, are seen glimmering through the woods. Then the banks of the river have too little foliage; and, instead of frothing, as it does, through its rocky channel, it has, in this picture, a grey, smooth faintness, like plashes of rain-water on a common. And the noble mountains, intersecting and rising one above another, are here softened and hazed away into indistinctness.

I have, it is true, a lover's tenaciousness about that scene, who desires nothing so much as perfect resemblance to the form he adores.

Assured that the friendly and accomplished artist had taken the utmost pains to make these views complete, I tried to conceal from him my want of consciousness, as I gazed upon that picture, that I was ideally standing on the Dinbren terrace, with the sweep of vales at my feet, their

foaming river, and the grand disorder of those mighty mountains which close the prospect.

Glover must not know that these his admirable landscapes have encountered the fastidiousness of a too precise, too vivid recollection; or, I should rather say, one of them; for the other is Dinbrenic, though rain-fraught clouds conceal the Eglwseg rocks almost entirely, and though the bright meads and dusky copses of the lovely, though narrow valley, between your house and the mountain of Castle-Dinas Bran, seem melted into each other, as beneath shrouding rains. A very picturesque effect is produced by one of the clouds, which seems in the act of rolling over the bosom of that mountainous cone; but the sky is turbid and terrible in its tempestuous aspect.

The less identified view has the softest lights of a summer evening horizon, when the sun leaves his last smile upon the hills.

A fine farce is playing in the senate; a juggle, of which the blindest idolaters of the weak, credulous, and cruel administration, now acting by their journeymen, seem ashamed. A finesse of meaner and more treacherous cunning no time has witnessed.

If the king had really opposed Mr Pitt's wishes respecting catholic emancipation, he would have made a real, not a mock resignation; and by an

appearance, at least, of honest resentment, have acquitted himself of premeditated treachery; but answering, as he does, for the persistence of his successor in the system which has ruined this nation, he puts but a cobweb-veil on his perfidy to Ireland, which every person penetrates; even his partizans here are offering wagers that he comes in again before the close of the year.

In becoming a tool to this despicable business; in consenting to stand forward the incompetent screen of Mr Pitt's low and perfidious manœuvres, Mr Addington acts beneath his own reputation, and deprives the nation of all rational trust in his integrity.

It is of the last importance to this country, that there should be a real change of ministry; that those should be called into power and action, who have uniformly demonstrated the impolicy and dangers of that system, which blasted our internal interests; confiscated our property in enormous and unprecedented taxation; and armed every nation against us. To its truly wise opposers we can only look with one hope, that is not insane, for rescue from our present perils, and preservation of the wreck, which yet remains, of British prosperity; a wreck which Mr Pitt, and his subservient senate, have made.

If ever a superintending Providence wrote disapprobation of human conduct in the broad characters of events, it has inscribed presumption, folly, and cruelty on this war, as it inscribed injustice and tyranny on that with America. From the self-incurred mischiefs and dangers of the American war, we were rescued by those who had uniformly opposed it. From the far greater mischiefs and dangers of this, we can only be so rescued now.

I doubt whether Lord St Vincent will accept the post which the newspapers have assigned him. I heard his entire disapprobation avowed, last summer, in one of his letters concerning the persisting in this contest, in which he has been so gallantly signalized. It is not likely that he will act with puppets danced on the Pittite wires.

All your eyes will be opened at last; but, I fear, not before the nation is irredeemably ruined. Desperation has begun its work in our little city, from my infant years, till within these six weeks, so peaceful and secure. Houses are broke open, and nightly attempted. The deanery has been robbed; and five ruffians entered the chamber of a widow lady, a mile out of town. Her property was saved by the presence of mind of her maid-servant, who, with a watchman's rattle, alarmed

the neighbouring houses. My apprehensions have caused my dressing-room door to be barricadoed like a jail, with bars and bolts. Thus do we begin to lose, in more than imaginary terrors, the quiet of our curtained sleep. Adieu!

LETTER LXII.

EDWARD JERNINGHAM, ESQ.

Lichfield, Feb. 23, 1801.

INDEBTED to you for two most gratifying letters, the delay of this acknowledgment can only plead excuse from the bad state of my health. It impedes the business of my pen; it is at war with the hope of longevity; but away with fruitless complaints and dismal forebodings!

Thank you for mentioning the new poetic literature. I have never seen any of Sir J. B. Burgess's verse. You tell me his epic poem has just emerged, and you say—"It is the *ton* to commend it, though nobody reads it, because it is written in the Spenceric stanza." There is no true taste in such idle fastidiousness. It has, in the present instance, been caught from the prejudiced

pages of Johnson's Lives. I recollect that, in them, the Goliah lays a broad heavy paw upon that form of verse. Infinite mischief is done to science of every sort, by the often irrational dogmas of people of high ability.

One of the most justly admired of our modern poems, the Minstrel, is written in the Spenceric stanza, which, without narrative, can interest, and, without exciting the passions, can, charm. No inevitable weariness, surely, attaches to an order of verse, through which such triumph has been attained. The Minstrel is certainly not of epic length; yet it is seldom that we read, at one sitting, more lines of an epic poem than are contained in the two books of the Minstrel. That, with all its genius and exhaustless fancy, the Fairy Queen tires our attention is certain; but it is of the eternal allegories, not of the measure, that we are weary.

Oberon is written in that measure, and, though a translation, a sort of epic, and certainly of epic length, has had very general reading, and may boast an everybody against Sir J. B. Burgess's nobody—but perhaps you will slily say, the voluptuous descriptions made the everybody for Oberon.

I have been amused by the gnat-strainers and camel-swallowers (who read a little poetry now

and then) praising and recommending Oberon to the perusal of their associates, while they abuse Darwin's charming Loves of the Plants for their licentiousness. They confess delight in exploring the human Harem of Wieland, and his translator, and turn away, with holy decency, from the enamoured pleasures, when they laugh and frolic in a blossom's bell.

I am unacquainted with the powers of Sir J. B. Burgess; but, as to Cumberland's Calvary, I could not read it through; and in an epic, from the smooth pen of the present laureate, I have no confidence. There is not strength in his wing for such a soaring. Mr Cottle's Alfred has not reached us, nor have I seen any thing he has written.

Southey's Joan d'Arc is the best epic I have read since Milton's, though from the imagination of a then scarce bearded stripling. Its design is exceptionable, but the stamp of genius is upon it. I inclose a philippic of mine upon its tendency. The lines ran off from my pen after first perusing the poem, and formed a literal impromptu.

But to return, for an instant, to metre-prejudices. They are morbid things. Surely no people of true and vivid taste for that charming science, will ever dislike a work of real genius on account of the metrical form it wears. Such

hectic dislikes live only with the Vainloves* of verse.

It has been said, "that form of government is best, which is best administered." So it may be said of poetry:—that order of verse is best in which most poetry is found. The stanza has one advantage over the heroic couplet, or even blank verse; which last, abstractedly considered, is perhaps the best vehicle for poetic ideas; viz. that the stanza enables the memory more easily to retain those detached parts which may be of prominent beauty.

I did not mean to express, as from myself, the slightest doubt of Sir Isaac Newton's faith in the Christian religion;—nothing more than my surprise that a prelate, of some eminence, should entertain and avow an idea so injurious to that great man; so contradictory to the received opinion; so mortifying to believers; so gratifying to infidels. Whitaker's book, which you say expresses the same belief, I have not seen.

If any words of mine were so unfaithful to my sentiments, as to induce your declaration of an upright intention in the composition of your interesting and eloquent treatise, and in the publication

* Vainlove, a fastidious inamorato in Congreve's comedy of the Old Bachelor.—*S.*

of your selections, I disclaim them utterly. I met you in the lists as knights used to meet each other in the tournament,—nothing doubting your skill in the contest, or your perfect honour. What appeared to me partiality to foreigners in your tract, induced me to take up the gauntlet for the talents of my countrymen. You support your preference of Bossuet to our best English sermon-writers with so much beautiful writing, and with so many just observations, that I dare believe our men of genius in that line may improve by your documents; though all which I think the dull drones of divinity will get by you is—the laugh of their congregation. You imp the wings of the eagles; but, in hustling up the owls, I think the sun, at which you point, may blind them wofully. Many a doughty doctor, and many a pompous prelate, will be found in the latter class.

What you tell me about the exclusion of compositions by English masters from the high-life concerts, only proves that the same infatuation prevails in that science amongst our great people, as in poetry amongst our academicians. It is the English mania to prefer the productions of foreigners to those of our own country. I see you are not acquainted with the beautiful compositions in music, which exist for the honour of

England. You have had no opportunity of hearing them, banished as they dully are from the fashionable concerts. So was Shakespeare banished our stage from the gay Gallic reign of Charles the Second, till the talents and resolution of Garrick restored him. So have been, and so still are, the great English poets from our universities, to the infinite detriment of the understanding and taste of our students, since superior to the Greek, Roman, and Tuscan bards, are the bards of Britain, in every line but of the epic, and even there our Milton equals Homer, and transcends Virgil. The good Lord Lyttleton, to the honour both of his head and heart, had patriot taste in the science he cultivated, as the following lines from his wildly beautiful Monody on his Lucy evince:

"With you* she search'd the wit of Greece and Rome;
And all that in her latest days,
To emulate her ancient praise,
Italia's happy genius cou'd produce;
And what the Gallic fire,
Bright sparkling, could inspire,
By all the graces tempered and refin'd;
Or what in Britain's isle
Most favour'd with your smile,
The powers of reason and of fancy join'd
To full perfection have conspir'd to raise."

* The Muses.

I hope you, who are of the elect, will, at least, with Lord Lyttleton, subscribe to that preference.

A few words more on the subject of music.—However weak a single exception, or even two or three exceptions, may be to obviate what is given us as a general rule, yet surely exceptions, numerous as those I brought in my former letter, and which are yet only a small portion of what exist, may render its validity at least questionable. Probably you have never heard the beautiful passages in Ossian, which are set as glees by Calcot, since you say you have not heard, at the fine people's concerts, these ten years, a single glee composed by an Englishman. O folly and affectation, how wide is your dominion! The Ossianic glees are ravishing; and, above all their brethren,

"Peace to the souls of the heroes!"

is most ravishing. I confess the beauty of Converso's—

"When all alone my pretty love was playing;"

but Morley has several, in exactly the same style, and of equal charm. I would answer for pro-

ducing an hundred glees from my own recollection, all by Englishmen, and all of original melody and correct harmony.

When I was a girl, it was the fashion for the fine people to abuse Handel as heavy, coarse, and tiresome. Our king, by instituting the commemorations, rescued his fame. If I was Prince of Wales, I would give concerts, from which every foreign composition should be interdicted; and glees should be performed there, that must awaken the cold dead ear of prejudice itself into life and enthusiasm. But it is time to close my controversy, for the clock has struck that hour which Burns, with equal humour and fancy, calls the key-stone of night's black arch. Addio!

LETTER LXIII.

Mrs Childers of Yorkshire.

Lichfield, April 29, 1801.

Ah, my friend, I have a sad account to give you of my situation, and of my hopes of ever being able to accept your kind invitation to Cantley. Too much reason have I to apprehend a

total loss of all ability to travel. You know that the strength of my youth was blighted by the accident which broke the patella of my right knee, though I obtained the power of walking on even ground, without perceptible lameness; but I remained, through life, subject to the constantly impending danger of falling. Frequent have been those falls, producing temporary pain and confinement, but generally a few days restored me to the usual level of my, at best, feeble exertion. On the 27th of last month, deceived by an imperfect moonlight, I fell with violence down steps into the street, after paying an evening visit. Then, alas! it was, that I so violently sprained the muscles and tendons of my, till then, uninjured left knee, as to reduce it to an equal degree of weakness with that which is broken. Unable to stand, I was carried by two men from my sedan to my bed; which my surgeon ordered I should not leave till the swelling and discoloration subsided. He flattered me that, since nothing was absolutely broken, a fortnight or three weeks would repair the mischief. When, at the four days expiration, I was got up, I found I had utterly lost all power of rising from my bed, or chair, even though a very high one, without the assistance of two people; and also of ascending or descending stairs. Hitherto time, in whose name lavish pro-

mises were made me by the faculty, has done nothing towards the restoration of that power, though I can walk, with a servant's arm, through the range of those fortunately large and airy rooms, which are level with my bed-chamber and dressing-room. Thus I contrive, by a quarter of an hour at a time, to walk my allotted two miles every day, though I have not attempted to go down stairs. These fresh vernal breezes from the cathedral area, in the south and west front of my house, and from the valley to the east, and from the gentle hills to the north, refresh me as I walk. I have pain, but, thank God, it is not violent. Some attached friends, and many social neighbours, cheer my confinement.

Hopeless and helpless imprisonment is a melancholy thing, however mitigated. To me it must preclude many circumstances material to my health, and precious to my wishes. I have chronic maladies, which often require Buxton waters and coast residence. If this last injury should, as I have a deep conviction that it will, prove irreparable, I shall not dare to travel; and in the loss of local freedom, vanish my hopes of seeing you at Cantley, or of meeting you where we have twice met, living, during happy weeks, in daily intercourse, confidential, affectionate, and literary:—and then there is dear Mrs Roberts, and her

charming neighbours, Lady Eleanor Butler and Miss Ponsonby, at whose Arcadian court it was so much my delight to pay my vows of amity! Those I must never more behold, if my present deprived state of limbs continues; for Mrs Roberts, totally crippled, cannot travel, and the Ladies of the Cambrian valley will not.

Within these last twelve years, my constitution has struggled with various maladies, but under them I always hoped relief, and often, through the goodness of God, obtained it. Now a deep internal conviction of life-long imbecility sickens at my heart, and withers the energy of my mind, —while the gloom of apprehension, more than selfish, often darkens my spirit. The oldest, the most esteemed, the most valued of my friends, finds his long-precarious health more frequently assailed by nervous malady, beneath which his strength and cheerfulness decline. I will not apologize for this exuberance of wailful egotism, but rest it securely on your sympathy.

I am soothed by your warm encomiums on my letters to Mr Jerningham*, on the subject of pulpit oratory, and by the desire you express to hear or see those sermons of mine, of which they

* Printed in the Gentleman's Magazine for February, March, and April.—*S.*

make mention. If ever I should be happy enough to converse with you again personally, you shall hear or read them. Then shall I feel my heart cheered by your sweet affectionate smiles, and my mind basking in those eye-beams of intelligence, sentiment, and taste, which emanate from a spirit so pure and enlightened.

With what animated serenity does your last letter describe the comforts of rendering all the purposes of life subordinate to religious faith and obedience. Dear angelic friend, how happy are you in having thus disciplined your mind and heart! My muse once drew a picture of such a mind and heart, unconscious then of its perfect prototype in you. I allude to the sixty-sixth of my published sonnets. It was written many years before I knew Mrs Childers, ere ought of her was present to my memory, beyond a mere eye-deep impression of youthful beauty and elegance in the form of Miss Sally Fowler, when twice, and in public company, we met in the gay years of virgin bloom. They are flown—but that is no subject of regret to you,

> "Whose yesterdays look backward with a smile,
> Not, like the Parthian, wound you as they fly."

The wish that I would translate your favourite

poem of Racine's, his Sur le Religion, yet lingers on your pen. Ah! I shall never again have spirits to attempt a new poetic task; and, besides, you have heard me express my accordance with Dr Johnson's opinion, that moral precepts, religious hopes, and pious ejaculations, have a better effect when they naturally arise out of lighter subjects in poetry, than when they form its professed and exclusive theme. I trust my publications are not destitute of such precepts, hopes, and aspirations. My sonnets have been publickly praised for having liberally involved them.

Then, surely, there is no want of religious poetry in our language. Has Racine enforced any maxims, imparted any hopes, any incentives to piety, any warnings to guilt, which may not be found in Milton, Young, and Cowper?—or has he illustrated them with powers of imagination superior to theirs? If not, a translation of his work, however spirited, would be superfluous. What lover of poesy, whose taste is rightly tempered, would choose to drink the waters of life from an under current, sluiced off from a Gallic fountain of papal faith, when they might draw them from their purer source in protestant principles and British genius!

I confess that opinions may be found in Godwin's writings, which deserve severe censure;—

but then, surely, there is so much truth, important to the morality, the justice, and the welfare of mankind, on his highly ingenious pages, that the unprejudiced reader would be sorry to see them fall into indiscriminate reprobation. St Leon has a noble moral, justifying the ways of God to man; and it appears to me, that the jaundiced eye of prejudice only can espy evil tendency in any part of that fine composition. I know our public critics abuse it with the same violence with which they stigmatized his really exceptionable writings.—They are of that very numerous class who, having once detected a writer in error, conclude every thing he writes must be erroneous. They know not how to separate the dross from the gold.

Our great and truly religious poet, Milton, published in defence of regicidism, under certain provocation given by a monarch to his people; such provocation as Charles the First certainly gave; and he published also a defence of conjugal repudiation for causes of temper solely, and asserted the husband's right to marry again where the wife had violated her vow of obedience. On the ground of those two publications, he was almost universally condemned as an impious and immoral writer, and his glorious poetry sunk into neglect and disrepute during seventy-five years. Dr Johnson, even in those later days, could not

shake off that prejudice against Milton's intentions, goodness of heart, and piety, which had disappeared from every other mind.

Adieu! Say kind things in your domestic circle for the poor prisoner, who now commits to your indulgent patience her sighs for the loss of local liberty. Let me have your prayers for the restoration of my injured limb, and for the resignation of my spirit under all the chastisements of Heaven.

LETTER LXIV.

Rev. R. Fellowes.

Lichfield, June 1, 1801.

Frequent ill health, and a severe personal accident, threatening to prove an incurable maim, has kept me long silent to a letter, in whose narrow bounds much ingenuity and just poetic taste are contained; but it speaks of unfitness for company, from mental business and depressed spirits. Intellectual energy and heart-sick dejection are seldom compatible, except under the goad of im-

perious necessity. Since you wrote that letter, I hope you have experienced the usual power of employment to banish care and dispel anxiety; employment so worthy of your talents, your heart, and your literary fame, over which the absurd and groundless censures of envious bigotry have cast no enduring cloud.

Such and so high is my esteem for your genius and your judgment, that I feel a certain pride and triumph of mind, whenever my opinions, religious, moral, or literary, are sanctioned by your coincidence. You demonstrate, in the letter before me, the justice of my favourite assertion concerning the superiority of Gray to Pindar, as a lyric poet; and you establish it on the eternal immutable principles of truth and reason. When, through the warp of prejudice, Taste forsakes them, as she sometimes does, even in the strongest minds, she must substitute declamation for analytic comparison, and verbal partiality, with its false lights, for the due perception of those intrinsic graces, in which the imagination delights, and which the understanding hallows.

I think myself highly honoured by your purpose of mentioning me favourably in the notes to your next publication. Praise from such a pen is fame.

Your domiciliary allegory for the Night Thoughts and the Task, charms me. It is exquisitely imagined.

How curious it is that Dr Young, whose great work is so deeply sombre, should have been always cheerful and often jocund in conversation,

"A brow solute, and ever-laughing eye;"

while Cowper, in the production by which he can alone be considered as a poet of eminence, amidst satire no less severely serious, courts his Penates with absolute sunshine of spirit, though it is well known that his bosom was, during long periods, a very Erebus. Its darkness is visible in his rhyme compositions, which, as poetry, are such very moderate performances.

Still does it appear to me, that the very luxury of mental contentment is the master-tint of the Task. It is true its second book opens beneath a cloud of misanthropy; but it seems to have been spread by just reflection on the cruelty of man to his species, and to be wholly unmixed with self-dissatisfaction. Should you favour me with another letter, I will thank you to point out those passages in the Task, which suggested your idea of "the breaking or broken heart of its author."

I must observe to you, that the Farmer's Boy grows upon me in its natural and interesting graces. I am ashamed of having spoken to you so coldly on its subject, after an hasty perusal, beneath the spleen and disappointment which Capel Loft's absurd preface had excited. He taught me to expect a second Chatterton in the magnitude of genius. But I was a greater fool than he, for suffering him so to mislead my expectations, since I ought to have been warned by the specimens contained in that preface, of Bloomfield's ballads and blank verse, which I still think very poor samples, though the editor extols them as first-rate lines. But I now estimate his greater work, the Farmer's Boy, as on a level with Rogers' Pleasures of Memory; and consider each as being amongst poetic compositions, what green is amongst colours; that they have not the richness of the golden yellow, the splendour of red, the elegance of pink and azure, the spirit of scarlet, or the grandeur of purple, but are of that hue on which the eye delights to dwell, which is lively without gaiety, and serious without melancholy.

I am delighted with Dr Parr's Spittal sermon, and its admirable notes. How luminously, in the former, does he reason and distinguish between the virtuous degree, and the unamiable extreme of individual or relative, patriot, or religious be-

benevolence; and of that universal love and charity which extend to the whole species. Incontrovertibly does he prove, that true virtue can only exist by the union of those principles, or rather by the natural growth of the latter out of the former; that to endeavour to disroot the limited philanthropy, to perfect that which is illimitable, is but to produce a pharisaic semblance of unreal goodness. He shews, and he convinces us, that such semblance is more hostile to true worth than bigotry. O! surely, in the formation of excellence, the two principles are one and indivisible, as faith and works in true Christianity.

How worthy of Dr Parr's clear head and warm heart, is his generous defence of your writings from the irrational, illiberal Calvinistic censures of the British Critic, and its echoers in other anonymous publications. They, who do not perceive the fidelity and beauty of your picture of Christianity, must love darkness rather than light; the horrid dreams of fanaticism rather than the reasonable claims and genuine duties of our mild religion.

It was by such demonizing of Deity that the gloomy sect overthrew the noble mind of Cowper. By the way, what a strange absurd sermon has been published, as a funeral oration on that dis-

tinguished unfortunate!—making cruel display of the horrid particulars of his insanity, over which good sense, compassion, and piety would shudder and draw a veil. This sermonizer speaks of the terrible ravings he specifies as unhappy mistakes of opinion merely; affects to account for them, and to warn and to guard the minds of other religious people from similar misconceptions. Unfeeling discloser of the secrets of that prison-house, in which the doctrines of thy school, hereditary cursedness, and the innate damnability of human frailty, had probably shut his soul, why dost thou not repair to Bedlam for other portraits of religious phrenzy, to the unquenchable fires of which, in all likelihood, the tenets of fanaticism had laid the train? Thou mightest, with equal propriety, warn and moralize upon them, as if the wretched originals were reasonable beings, only with erroneous opinions!

In Dr Parr's list of the literary characters of Cambridge, I confess myself disappointed not to find my dear father's name. Surely he had better pretensions to that honour than his namesake, Mr William Seward; that cold compiler of scraps of history, frequently without much interest in themselves, and always without any felicity of introduction or narration. My father, educated

of Westminster school, and Fellow of St John's, Cambridge, is known to the learned world as the chief editor, though in concert with Mr Simpson, of the best edition extant of Beaumont and Fletcher's numerous and admirable dramas. The large collection of notes to that work is almost exclusively my father's, as also the excellent preface. They abound in highly ingenious emendation, and in just criticism. His learned and able tract, the Conformity between Popery and Paganism, had great celebration in its day; nor less high in the estimation of the public were several of his occasional sermons, which passed the press. There are sweet little poems of his in Dodsley's Miscellany. Their author was well understood at the time that work appeared, though, by mistake, his name was not inserted. His eulogium on Shakespeare is amongst the number of those verses, and entitled, On seeing Shakespeare's Monument at Stratford upon Avon. They are given correctly in the first edition of those volumes; in later ones there is a word most ridiculously altered by the printers. I suppose they thought it a nice improvement to substitute a perfect for an imperfect rhyme, at the utter expence of the sense and unity of the metaphor—thus:

> "Nor yet unrivall'd the Meonian strain,
> The British eagle and the Mantuan swan
> Tower equal heights."

They have changed *swan* to *swain*.

I do not think myself partial in believing those verses the most spirited tribute to the genius of our immortal dramatist which I have seen, not even excepting Milton's epitaph upon him. It grieves me that my father's memory should pass without its fame from the Ossian of oratoric praise, who strings his sacred harp and applausive lyre beneath the bowers of Hatton.

I inclose three of my songs, and flatter myself you will find the imagery and turn of thought original in all. Mr Hayley has often praised my song-writing. Translations and paraphrases excepted, I have always destroyed every little production of my own, if, on revising it, after the effervescence of composition had subsided, I could not find that it contained something original, either in the thoughts themselves, or in their combination. I was gratified about the first of these three songs by a lady having written to H. White from Lisbon, and observed that she found her oppressed sense of the sultry climate soothed and beguiled by repeating, twenty times a-day, that

[illegible]*, a copy of which I had given her a year before she left England. To be sure Shakespeare's exclamation questions the power of such sort of comfort:

> "O! who can hold a fire in his hand
> By thinking on the frosty Caucasus!"

but then a Sirocco wind on the banks of the Tagus and actual cautery are two things. Adieu!

LETTER LXV.

Miss Stevens of Milton, Derbyshire.

Lichfield, June 3, 1801.

Your request does me honour, and it would be an heartfelt satisfaction, could I prove instrumental to the preserved remembrance of talents and virtues, whose sudden terrestrial extinction cost me many sighs.

Your brother's poetic genius has more than

* Song of a Northern Lover. All the imagery is that of a cold and mountainous country in winter.—*S.*

once thrown public lustre on my compositions, by the utmost elegance of classic encomium.

The track of epitaph is so beaten, that we find it difficult in the extreme to crop one fresh floret for the shrine of departed worth. In this instance, the limited number of lines, necessarily so narrow, increases the difficulty. The following lines, however, were literally an impromptu, written within a quarter of an hour after the receipt and perusal of your letter. They were laid by, without examination, during some days, that I might correct and improve them, after the effervescence of composition had subsided, and when, having forgotten them, I could perceive their merit or demerits as plainly as if they had been written by another person.

Thus premising, shall I confess that I think they would have pleased me as the production of a stranger; and that, upon repeated consideration, I know not how to mend them. The fourth line is picture, and not coldly copied from another's canvas. If, however, these lines should contain any thing which you, or other friends of the deceased, desire should be altered, I will endeavour to make them more what you would choose to see inscribed upon so dear a shrine.

I could wish them to be shewn to Sir Francis Burdett, before they are either altered or put on

monument. His great talents and friendship for your late brother, make the sanction of his approbation desirable to me, or would give weight to any objections which he might have the goodness to communicate.

I remain, Madam, &c.

EPITAPH ON THE REV. WILLIAM BAGSHAW STEVENS.

READER, if thee each sacred worth inspires,
The patriot's ardour, and the poet's fires;
Unsullied honour; friendship's generous glow;
Sky-pointing hope, that smiles on finite woe;
Such Stevens was, and thy congenial tear
Drops on the scholar—bard—and Christian's bier."

LETTER LXVI.

THOMAS PARK, ESQ.

Lichfield, June 10, 1801.

SINCE I have never seen you claiming for the gentle, the engaging, and self-enlightened Bloomfield, the very highest poetic ground, there is sure-

ly little difference in our opinions on the subject of his Farmer's Boy, considered as an whole. All the honour for its merits remains with me, which they can claim from an impartial reader, who has made the exquisite poetry of this country her peculiar and life-long study:

> "Who bows not to the whistling of a name,
> No dupe to learning, and no fool to fame;"

but can mark, with equal eye, the defects of the most established in reputation, as in those of the candidate for the Delphic laurel.

That Bloomfield's work is a natural, interesting, and original poem, I feel, and I have acknowledged; and I believe that it has strength to bear itself above that oblivious tide, so certain to overwhelm, and speedily, all merely moderate verse; and which has sometimes, for a long succession of years at least, overwhelmed beautiful compositions; as, for instance, Mallet's Amyntor and Theodora. It is in fine blank verse; the story is of the sweetest and most powerful interest; the scenery novel and striking; the imagery vivid. But Bloomfield's Farmer's Boy is calculated to the meridian of a much more numerous class of readers. Thousands there are, and will hereafter be, who have recognized, and must in future re-

cognize, the fidelity of its pictures, with whose originals they are daily familiar, yet to whom grander personifications, the delicacies of honour, and the higher strains of morality, form a dead letter—and they are the graces of Mallet's poem. However the suffrages of the few who, as generations rise up and pass away, perceive the value of genuine poetry, ought to have preserved it. That they have suffered it to die on the public attention is to me inexplicable, except it was from that dislike to blank verse which Dr Johnson had inspired, through the course of his despotic influence on the taste of the lettered world.

I confess my surprise that you are silent concerning my message to Bloomfield, and the alterations I suggested for the few exceptionable passages in the Farmer's Boy; since, if he did not choose to adopt them verbally, they would at least prove to him that, contrary to his idea of the difficulty of improving them, it was not only possible, but easy, in those instances, to render inconsistency consistent, without diminishing the spirit of the passages.

No young writer should be encouraged in the incongruity of metaphor. The greater his genius, the more material it is that his judgment should be cultivated, and his taste rendered accurate. From such sort of friendly criticisms, my verse

has often received advantage; my judgment been strengthened against future commission of similar errors, and endowed with the power of instantly perceiving them in the works of others.

Indeed you are mistaken in supposing that my public controversy with Mr Weston, about the reputation and claims of the sweet swan of Twickenham, produced a diminution of our mutual amity, warmly as each defended the glory of their favourite poet. Neither has any alienation of friendship ensued upon my late contest in the Gentleman's Magazine, with the ingenious and amiable Jerningham. Truth is elicited in such kind of disquisition; prejudices are brought to her test, and the perplexities of thought disentangle by developement.

Hence, as Dr Beattie finely observes, " Fancy learns to fix her aim, to fluttter no longer on fickle pinions, and to try her own effusions, and those of others, by the immutable laws of sense, reason, and consistency."

Taste, it is true, is extremely various; but where good sense, metaphoric consistency, or the rules of grammar are accused of having suffered violation in certain instances, the cause may not be tried at her arbitrary tribunal. Taste can only be allowed to preside on broad and general ground—thus:—a reader, endowed with sensibili-

ty to perceive the powers and the charms of fine writing, both in prose and verse, may prefer Pope's poetry, not only to Dryden's, but even to Milton's. Dr Johnson certainly did. Another ingenious man may like Dryden better than Pope, and Addison's prose better than Johnson's;—but if it were possible that any of those writers could be charged with having violated, in particular passages, good sense, intelligibility, the congruity of metaphor, or the laws of grammar, the defence of those passages could not be referred to the decision of taste. If, on the principles of sound sense, the established laws of our language, and the allowed licences of poetry, which sanctions no opacities that the understanding cannot pierce, they may not be justified, then candour will confess them indefensible. On the contrary, if they can be defended on those grounds, their justification must be easily made; and, if the accuser is ingenuous, he will, when made, confess that his charge had been hastily and inconsiderately brought.

I shall be glad to see the emerging poems of Bloomfield, of which you make such honourable mention. From the title of one of them, Market Night, I conclude he has tried his strength with the muse of Burns, whose Market Night, entitled Tam o' Shanter, is one of the ablest compositions

of the kind I ever met. In it, characteristic nature, humour, and sublimity, are blended, and with skill that is at once judicious, daring, and masterly.

You sent me a curious specimen of priestly fortitude from Deering's sermon, preached before Queen Elizabeth. The race of such unflattering pastors is extinct. The Gloriana of those times is said to have been a very absolute monarch; and it is also said, that the liberty of the subject has been greatly increased since her golden days. Yet, if a preacher were as freely to reprehend and warn our king, in his royal presence, he would be silenced on the instant; turned out of the pulpit, and hurried into bedlam, or the Bastile in the Cold-Bath-Fields. Not Parr himself durst make the experiment.

You threw cold water on my investigations in good time; a cruel personal misfortune had, previous to the receipt of your last, dampt all the energy of my mind, and rendered writing irksome, —even to my most valued friends. Unmolested by me, therefore, in future, shall you admire Miss Bannerman's muse, and despise Darwin's. Addio!

LETTER LXVII.

BARUCH LOUSADA, Esq. Devonshire.

Lichfield, June 23, 1801.

I HAVE great pleasure in the content and happiness which breathe through your letter. The beauty that smiles, and the pure gales, mountainous and maritime, which blow around your delightful retreat, charm you, I perceive, with daily increasing power. The constant succession of impressions so agreeable, will prolong your days of strength, and the period of longevity. Friends and acquaintance are fickle—are mortal; or, retaining their being and their kindness, are often removed from us so distantly, that no traces of their society remain, except the ghost of it upon a piece of paper; but the lovely scenery of our home-situation, unalienably ours, is an ever-new, ever-increasing delight to minds which have any taste for the scenic beauties of nature. All affections grow and increase by indulgence; the lawns we have smoothed, the trees we have cultured, are our grateful friends, our unoffending children. When spring restores their faded bloom, we seem

to partake their renovation. The rejuvenescence of general nature, when our life is past its meridian, has perhaps a tendency to inspire melancholy sensations; but the revived youth of our *own* scenes exhilarates our spirits. They are parts of ourselves, which rise up again before us with added charms and graces.

Our friends, Mr and Mrs Simpson, are on their road from town, hastened by a melancholy event, the death of Mrs Stephen Simpson, sister-in-law to the gentleman you know. In the fulness of her youth, beauty, and strength, has she perished, —by the same fatal circumstance in childbirth that robbed the world of the distinguished author of the Rights of Woman.

We of this city, who so recently witnessed the luxury of health in this late-selected victim of the king of terrors, who felt the cheering influence of her open-hearted smiles, and listened to the melody of her syren-songs, scarcely know how to think of her as one that was, and is not. Never for youthful pair did the marriage-torch shine with a more pure and steady light. It is hard when the cypress bud is found lurking in such a well-culled and unfaded wreath. Adieu!

LETTER LXVIII.

Copy of a Letter to the DEAN and CHAPTER.

Lichfield, Oct. 3, 1801.

GENTLEMEN,—I have heard, with deep concern, of your design to impoverish still farther the useful and lovely shades of the Dean's Walk, already much injured by the unsightly bareness at the top of the walk; by the disproportioned width of the trees before the deanery and Mr Danniel's house; and by their awkward lopping before Dr Falconer's. The now-purposed devastation is of tenfold magnitude. I am conscious that all power to carry it into effect exists in the Dean and Chapter; but I write humbly to deprecate its exertion, the mischief of which must be irreparable to the beauty of the Close, as the demolition of the conduit, by a similar decree, has proved to the convenience of its inhabitants, and to its safety in case of fire.

Consider, Gentlemen, that this now gracefully shaded area is the admiration of travellers, the pride and delight of those who live within its boundaries!—that it is a fixed principle in land-

scape-taste, that wherever there is continuous shade, if it is not full and luxuriant, it ceases to be beautiful; that the effect of taking away every other tree, will be like drawing every other tooth in the front of a well-furnished mouth; that the disposition of trees to approximate, will, after such sad thinning, produce, in length of time, an effort of the boughs to shoot horizontally, which must form a straight line, or something near a straight line, at top. That free, irregular, and graceful outline, which, since they have been allowed to grow naturally, they form where they have not been thinned, will be broken and lost. If only the few short and weaker trees were to be felled, the mischief might not be of a magnitude so deplorable, —but it is grievous to see the seal of destruction on a number of the very noblest amongst those which have hitherto been spared.

Milton's description of the Garden of Eden, is allowed to have formed that taste in landscape, which has rendered the English pleasure-grounds so celebrated. He there mentions impervious shade amongst the beauties of Paradise,—thus:

"And where the morning sun first warmly smote
The open field, and where the unpierc'd shade
Embrown'd the noon-tide bowers."

I entreat, Gentlemen, that you will, at least,

redeem the marked victims, which now stand in the pride of their strength and grace, before the gates of the house in which I dwell. A handsome house is a much more picturesque object, at a little distance, from being in part shaded; and the walk once entered, the palace appears with much better effect for having been, for an instant, partially veiled. Ah! why deprive her who now inhabits it, and those by whom it may hereafter be occupied, of the pleasant shade which those devoted trees now cast over the court? Pray, pray spare them! I should be happy if my pleadings might avail for the preservation of all the fine trees now bearing the fatal warrant; that it might, ere yet too late, be considered how dangerous it is to alter what cannot be restored, and what is already at once useful and lovely. Every person with whom I have conversed upon the subject, has lamented this plan.

I have the honour to remain, Gentlemen, your faithful and obedient servant.

LETTER LXIX.

Right Hon. Lady Eleanor Butler, and Miss Ponsonby.

Lichfield, Oct. 3, 1801.

Recently returned from Buxton, it is one of the first employments of my pen to thank you, dearest ladies, for the transparency you were so good as to send me by your late delighted and grateful visitors. Afresh are Mr Saville and his pleasing daughter obliged and charmed by kindness, which even surpassed the hopes they entertained of a welcome reception in the Cambrian Eden. It has been our theme each time we have met, since the devoted bowers of the cathedral area again received me.

I said devoted. It is a sore, sore subject; never did my local attachments sustain so deep a wound. It will rankle, it will fester incurably. O! what a curse is formed by human folly, obstinacy, and pride, combined with the power to commit outrage.

All the inhabitants of this yet lovely Close have been, for years, suffering daily inconvenience,

the result of innovations; while its safety, in case of fire, is put in constant peril. A large stone conduit, ascended by steps, and placed on the highest part of the area, supplied us with plenty of fine soft-water, descending by separate pipes to all our houses and gardens. It was a monument of the wisdom and liberality of the former inhabitants, who, at a great expence, and by subscription, caused it to be erected. Nor was it by any means an object of deformity. Our dignitaries thought it would be better away, and down sunk our capacious bed of waters. A miserable pump became its substitute, utterly unable to supply the necessities of the surrounding families.

A similar edict to sink, and to widen the approach to the west front of the cathedral, has endangered the foundation of a whole row of houses, and the safety of all who live in them, and of every foot-passenger. That was last summer's mischief; and now an order is gone forth, from the same dire source, to destroy the beauty of this celebrated close, by cutting down alternately its noble lime-trees,

"From storms our shelter, and from heat our shade."

By the bad taste of former times they had been cut into formal arches, and their level top-line,

till a passage in André's letters shamed the annual practice of deformity, and restored their ample branches to freedom, to beauty, and to grace; but this meditated outrage is of far transcending direnes, without the excuse of custom, and the sanction of fashion to mitigate its sin.-

I have addressed the dean and chapter as a body, to deprecate this violence; but my pleadings will be in vain, and only stimulate that pride which delights to commit irreparable injuries in the wantonness of power.

Pardon me that I have thus obtruded upon your attention the bitterness of a grieved spirit. The poignacy of your own local attachment ensures your kind sympathy with mine.

I was interrupted, and so interrupted!—Away ye scenic regrets!—You may return—you will, you must; but you shall not gloom the sunshine of this day!

Just as I had finished the last sentence, Cousin Thomas White shouted in the gallery, "Peace! Peace on earth, and good will towards men!"—and rushed breathless into my dressing-room, to confirm his annunciation.

Equal was my surprise and my joy—so long as those heavenly attributes have been banished from the wishes of our cabinet, and from the

hopes of England's true friends, and genuine patriots!

In less than half an hour the bells in all our churches began to clash their sonorous tongue in exulting imitation of the cannon's thunder.

Monday, Oct. the 5th.

Joy sits on every face!—even those, who warmly defended the infatuated contest, now, like James and Arabella Harlowe, when Clarissa's danger was announced to them, "are with the foremost to rejoice in the purposed reconciliation." Our city illuminates to-morrow.

I congratulate you both upon these blessed tidings; auspicious to the quiet of your hearts in a degree beyond that of an individual portion in this general good; since, while it remains inviolate, it secures the provincial dependence of Ireland on this country. To the nobler claim of sister-amity, a bribed majority in her senate blasted her pretensions, by resigning the right of self-legislation; but as that was the work of a few, against the wishes of the many, a French descent, twenty thousand strong, must probably have struck off Ireland as a branch of the British empire, as completely as the impotent tyranny of exertion struck off America.

Colonel B——, who shares Lord M——'s

bosom-counsel, and who is, besides, himself a sound and discerning politician, told me at Buxton, that the Dove of Peace was abroad, and would, ere long, return to these shores with the olive-branch. I was sceptical to his augury, infected by the prevailing opinion that Buonaparte would not now make peace with us till he had tried invasion.

"No, Madam," replied my friend; "those look not coolly on the changing times, who exclaim,

"His throne is tempest, and his state convulsion."

"Those days are past. The people of France long for peace. Their Chief wishes, not less ardently, to maintain his supremacy. It is true the conquest of Ireland, which would soon be followed by that of England, must have covered him with glory; but the attempt would be setting his power in France upon a desperate cast.—If he fails, he falls. His glory is already great, beyond all need of augmentation; and, presenting his country with her anxious wish, he endears himself to her afresh, and by multiplied ties; and to the triumphant title of her hero, adds that of her wise legislator, her indulgent father."

This dear proclamation has proved Colonel B——'s sentiments oracular.

Giovanni cautions me to restrain the fulness of my joy till we know, with more certainty, the terms on which the pacific blessings, so long banished, are restored to us. Sincerely do I wish they may prove favourable, even to the utmost wish of national partiality; but if they shall be found below its level, we should reflect that we have deep crimes of incendiarism to expiate. That which many would proudly call an inglorious peace, is far better than the continuance of an inhuman, an unavailing war. I have the honour to remain, &c.

LETTER LXX.

MRS M. POWYS.

Lichfield, Oct. 10, 1801.

IT appears, by your kind packet, received last week, that you did not think yourself a letter in my debt; and thus one has certainly miscarried, either of mine or yours, since, to a very long epistle, which I sent to you on the 22d of May,

I have not received an answer. It expressed much, and very sincere delight in the hope you had extended that you would be my guest this month. It was a dear and desired expectation, to which I looked forward during my month's pilgrimage in the land of strangers; made, alas! in vain for the purpose of restoring the strength I lost by my false step in March, whose ides were to me Cæsarian. A succession of maladies persecuted me at Buxton, till I measured back my way to dear Lichfield, and all the traces it bears of past happiness.

There I trusted to find a letter that should announce your speedy arrival; instead of it I receive one which throws this hope forward to a distant horizon—a whole year's delay! Melancholy is such a long perspective at my time of life, and with such threatening sensations of the head and heart as often visit your friend. Existence, precarious in all its stages, is of much-increased uncertainty, when so much in the wane as it is with me. How eloquent are the Night Thoughts on this theme!

> "Time in advance behind him hides his wings,
> And seems to creep, decrepid in his pace;
> Behold him when past by! what then is seen
> But his broad pinions, swifter than the wind?"

I congratulate you that the friend you have so assiduously, so fondly nursed, seems now, at length, rescued from a long-opened grave. May her future health and ease reward your cares, your anxieties, your sympathy! Deeply impressed in my mind and heart is the recollection of similar feelings, when in the autumn 1769, and the spring 1770, my dear Honora Sneyd's cheek exchanged the bloom of health for the hectic flush; the fine spirit of her youth for the languor of malady. She was also rescued! but O for what a fate, after two smiling years had fled rapidly away.

I have also to congratulate you on the great national blessing, peace. Humiliating as are the terms for us, and glorious for France, the protraction of a foolish and wicked war, which has overturned the balance of power in Europe, and rendered France, Great Britain excepted, exclusively its mistress, would have accelerated rapidly that subjugation of this country, which her late ministry has rendered unavoidable, the instant our self-provoked foe can obtain a navy to cover her descent upon our islands, possessing, as she does, such a commanding line of coast; the, to us, fatal present the war had made her. If England, instead of subsidizing Austria, had permitted her to make peace when she had recovered the

Netherlands, and prior to the subjugation of Holland, which, but for us, she would gladly have done, this dread preponderance of Gallic sway had been averted, and Great Britain safe. The terms on which we obtain the pacific blessings incontrovertibly prove the wisdom of those who reprobated the insane contest. Had England obtained the *status quo ante bellum*, that would have shewn the waste she to no purpose made of her people's lives and health, and of the national treasures, and of the peace of Europe. The present terms of capitulation speak that cruel waste, and speak it trumpet-tongued.

Yet, as worse fate for Britain awaited the yet drawn-sword, its sheathing must fill the hearts of all, who truly love their country, with thankfulness to Heaven, who has bent, at last, the stubborn hearts of our rulers to submission to the consequences of their dire system. All will rejoice in peace, where private views, ambitious or pecuniary, do not stifle the feelings of humanity, and all solicitude for the safety and interests of this country, and the comforts of millions of her natives, to say nothing of the rescue of those unhappy states from a repetition of the miseries consequent upon being the seat of belligerent conflict; its deaths, its desolations. I said every heart, uncorrupted by sanguinary selfishness, would

be gladdened—Alas! I must also except the sisters, parents, and wives of the victims of the war. Their sighs must heave, their tears flow, their cheeks be pale amid the flush of general joy.

Swift, in masterly ridicule of a nation's propensity to rush into unnecessary wars, counsels its rulers always to ground them upon an hypothesis, since, in all probability, no other ground will be found tenable; but, on that foundation, reason takes arms in vain. This advice our late ministry completely followed. Its hypothesis was, "to crush Jacobinism;" to be sure the sacrifice of our people's lives, and of the national wealth, was certain to obtain that end! Yes, as certain as the recorded Gothamite scheme to hedge in the cuckoo; for so sure as the cuckoo could not fly over the hedge, so surely would it be impossible for Jacobinism to preserve its tenets, while our fleets and armies were labouring, in vain, to restore monarchy to a country whose monarchs were never friendly to us, while our national debt was annihilating millions on millions, and while our poor were famishing for bread.

Finely does Shakespeare, that mighty master of nature and of truth, caution the rulers of nations against rashly entering into quarrel with other states.

" We charge you, in the name of God, take heed
How you awake the sleeping sword of war!
For never two such kingdoms did contend
Without much fall of blood, whose guiltless drops
Are every one a woe, and sore complaint
'Gainst him, whose mandate edges those keen swords,
Which make such waste of brief mortality."

With what kindness do you speak of our long friendship! I am soothed that its vestiges are precious in your recollection. Often do I live over again, in idea, those days in which our friendship was gladdened by frequent personal intercourse; and in which we had one * object on which to gaze with delight, to listen to with transport; with whom to sympathize, and for whom to hope. Very many years have rolled away since that "silver cord was loosed," and new eras pass on in succession, without seeing those two meet, who most lament her loss, and most sacredly preserve her memory!

This is to be regretted; but many are the regrets which cloud existence. They pass away in youth, like the chill gales and transient showers of an April sky. The sun of hope and joy succeeds, as the actual sun succeeds to those wintry lingerings when he looks on the young grass and

* Honora Sneyd.—*S.*

the half-blown leaves, and drinks their rain-drops; and when he expands the flowers and fruits in their germs. The clouds of waning life are dense, and their rains are blighting. If the sun of cheerfulness sometimes disperses them, it shines, but it does not warm; it gilds, but it does not invigorate; it is often beautiful, but never genial.

This is melancholy moralizing; imagination, however, is soothed, while she enwreaths with such pensive flowers the sepulchre of time.

LETTER LXXI.

Rev. J. C. Woodhouse *.

Lichfield, Oct. 11, 1801.

I take the liberty of inclosing a letter addressed to the Dean and Chapter, on the subject of their late order to cut down every alternate tree of those fine and noble limes which shade the Dean's Walk. I think it probable the Dean, to whom I sent my letter, will not present it.

* One of the canons residentiary of the cathedral of Lichfield who form the Chapter.—*S.*

And now, Sir, I will suppose you have read my deprecation. It is said, the Dean and Mr Nares have declared this plan was of your proposing. Rumour is a lying spirit, and I have too much confidence in Mr Woodhouse's taste in scenery to believe that he would so counsel, however he might be led to acquiesce in this scheme of innovation. They tell me that the pleaded excuse for it is, that the present fulness of shade makes the walk damp. All earthly advantages have their mixture of inconvenience. Because our gold has some alloy, we do not change it for copper.

Surely the cool shelter from oppressive suns; the grace, the beauty of liberal umbrage, is of infinite preponderance in the scale against the comfortless aridness of exposed gravel. When winter has stript the leaves, no dampness annoys the Dean's Walk, and when moisture lingers, after heavy rains, in the summer foliage, the flags of the streets, the margin of the Minster-pool, and the broad paths of the Milk-crofts are at hand for a dry walk; but, excepting the Palace gardens, which must not be considered as public property, where will the inhabitants of the Close and its vicinity find a pleasant, near walk, when the summer sun shall flare through the straggling

disunited trees, ruined in their proportion, their beauty, and their use?

Thirty-five years past some person persuaded my father that a similar plan would improve the shaded terrace of this garden. Two of its trees were felled before I knew any thing of the matter. Then did I implore, and I believe with tears, redemption for the remainder, and obtained it. The injurious gaps, which the loss of those two trees made, are not filled up at this hour. My father, in fruitless regret for what he could not restore, strove in vain to supply the loss of those noble limes by planting elder-trees in their vacancies. But for my entreaties all this now delightful terrace had been pervious, instead of impervious shade, and I, and my friends, had lost its salutary shelter from dazzling and sultry rays.

And the no less precious Dean's Walk, which now renders this cathedral area the loveliest in England—for the brethren and companions' sake of your youthful days, be not you instrumental in violating the bowers which sheltered them and yourself! All of us who remain on earth, rejoiced in your being restored to Lichfield, as an inhabitant, part of the year, after so many years absence. Let us not have to say that you come to destroy our comforts, but to protect them!

I congratulate you on the pacific prospects.

They descended upon the sanguinary gloom of a calamitous and cruel warfare, like a tropic morning, which has no twilight.—Adieu!

LETTER LXXII.

REV. J. C. WOODHOUSE.

Lichfield, Nov. 1, 1801.

I CANNOT forbear to intrude upon you once more, with my thanks for your obliging letter, and effort to obtain from the Dean and Chapter, acceptance of * mine and Mr Dyott's offer, and the rescinding of their anti-sylvan mandate; but they are inexorable.

When Dr Vyse destroyed the trees before his house, I told him that, sorry as I was to see the upper part of this area so denuded, I was still infinitely more sorry for the circumstance, as a

* The first reason alleged for this order of the Dean and Chapter was, that the money which the banished trees would bring, would gravel the walk. The author of these letters then offered to begin a subscription for that purpose with ten guineas, if the trees might be spared, and Mr Dyott of Freeford offered his teams, during a week, to fetch the gravel.—S.

dangerous precedent; that Mr Brereton and his tenants would be likely to adopt the same idea, viz, that the Dean's Walk trees made that house gloomy and damp; the Dean, that they produced the same injury to him; the Bishop, to his out-houses and stables, nay to the Palace itself, though it is one of the dryest houses that can be; so that, ere long, we should entirely lose our shade and shelter. Dr Vyse, and every one else, disbelieved my prophecy, and rallied my fears. Alas! but one short year is passed, and the work of destruction is about to proceed! Dr Vyse called here the other morning, to say, that the Dean would not relinquish his plan, for that he thought the trees made his garden-wall green and damp! as if all old moss-grown garden walls were not necessarily green and damp in wet weather! also, that Mr Fell had complained of the same imaginary mischief from them to the house of Canon Brereton, in which he and his sister live. Thus is my prediction accomplishing, and, I have no doubt, will be accomplished to its last letter; for when these gentlemen find, as they will assuredly find, that their houses and gardens do not cease to be humid after this alternate demolition, they will impute the radical defect to the poor, straggling, disunited trees, which it is now intended should be spared. In conse-

quence the decree will go forth against them, till no vestige of the present verdant beauty and shelter will remain to the Close of Lichfield. Those of the deprived inhabitants, who know the value of this luxuriant umbrage, will feel incessant regret, and utter fruitless philippics against its destroyers. Travellers will come, they who saw this area shaded and adorned, will come, and, indignantly cry out, Who has done this?

I have better hopes for our budding olives, though Grenville and Windham would scatter them to those bitter and blasting winds which, Dryden finely says, blow from every point of the compass, round the temple of Mars.

I remain, &c.

LETTER LXXIII.

Rev. Richard Levett of Lichfield.

Nov. 9, 1801.

If the frost had continued you had received a visit from me this morn, and seen your book returned by my own hands. The slippery greasiness of a damp day keeps me within doors, and

obliges me to request, by this billet, the loan of the ensuing volume, proceeding, I conclude, with these letters from Swift to Stella. Though I read the oddities as Pistol eats his leek, I have yet, as they are new to me, a desire to go on with them; since they draw, at intervals, the curtains of the court-cabinet, at an interesting period; and since they often present the names of Prior, Congreve, Addison, and Steele, which act upon my imagination like a spell. I am surprised, however, not to meet the name of Pope here, with whom Swift lived in so much intimacy. It is odd he should not have seen him during a year's elapse. His name had been replete with yet stronger magic. I cannot resist the desire of raking yet farther into this journalizing rubbish, for thinly-scattered pearls.

What inevitable wonder that a man of so much ability could disgrace his better sense, and the understanding of his Stella, by such bald, disjointed, canting prate, as would disgrace an old woman, scribbling to her granddaughter.

When I would consider Swift as a man of genius,

> "These daily loads of skimble-scamble stuff
> Do put me from my faith."

They inspire also the worst possible opinion of Swift's moral rectitude, since we know, that at the very period when these mawkish, doting letters were addressed to his real, though unowned wife, he was seducing the affections and chastity of the young and lovely Esther Vanhomrigh, to whom his letters, which I have read, are equally fond; on whom he wrote the beautiful, though dishonourable, poem, Cadenus and Vanessa, which insinuates that voluptuous connection, which his letters to her more than insinuate, in all the coffee passages. Mark how he avoids exciting the jealousy of Stella in these journals, by not once mentioning to her the young creature, whom his desertion drove to despair and suicide! When he records his frequent visits to Vanessa's mother, he takes care to complain of them as stupid uninteresting lounges.—The hypocrite!

LETTER LXXIV.

MR WHALLEY.

Lichfield, Nov 19, 1801.

IN the kind and extended letter before me, there is expiation for a long and regretted silence. I wish the state of your health had been less answerable for that my deprivation; yet so enchantingly humorous is the description of its mutability, that it mingles smiles with my sighs.

Indeed, I have every honour for Mrs H. More's talents and virtues. It was entirely owing to my recollection how much she had, in the year 1791, when I was your guest, distressed the feelings of that dear saint, that genuine Christian, Mr Inman, by introducing into his pulpit the rank Methodist, Mr Newton, which induced me to believe, that her endeavours to promote Methodist principles were continued in her neighbourhood. Mrs H. More expressed to me, at her own house, admiration of the despicable rant we had heard, the preceding Sunday, from Newton; of which Mr Inman, yourself, and all our party, had expressed our horror. That good man imputed to

Mrs More the increase of those pernicious principles in your county. I have read nothing of the late controversy on that subject, except from your statement. Notwithstanding your acquittal of the lady, I own I thought it not likely, that she, whom Mr Inman had heretofore so deeply blamed on that subject, should be wholly blameless in the similar arraignment brought against her "by a gownman of a different make."

The misery, the despair, which the gloomy Calvinistic tenets have produced, makes me abhor them; they are not Christianity; they are not common sense.

Mrs H. More's ingenious work on education, contains one chapter which proves the continuance of those principles in her mind. It maintains the absurd doctrine of original sin, as if a just God could have made the task of virtue of infinitely increased difficulty to the sons and daughters of Adam, for the sin of their first parents It is a dreadful, a blasphemous supposition, founded only upon a few dark texts of St Paul, and nowhere authorized by Christ. On the contrary, He repeatedly speaks of the primeval innocence of children, and says, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven."

Every being must be innocent, till, by sin, either of thought or deed, against the light of rea-

son committed, and the warnings of conscience, they forfeit that innocence.

Such, and no more, was the innocence of Adam and Eve, who lost it on the first temptation, and that a slight one. There is, therefore, no reason to think their first nature better than ours. Eden was to be theirs conditionally—on their obedience to the will of God. Heaven is to be ours on the same condition. The commission of sin, mentally or corporally, alone renders a Mediator necessary to man. For our nature, if God is just, we cannot be accountable, since our will was not concerned in its formation; and if, indeed, that nature is so inherently corrupt and abominable, as it is represented by Mrs H. More, Mr Wilberforce, &c., the wickedest amongst us is more an object of pity than of just indignation in the eyes of a pure and perfect Being. But the feelings of pity; a strong involuntary sense of justice; of filial obedience due to Him who created us with perceptions of happiness, and powers of enjoyment; of gratitude to that Heavenly Bestower, and to such of our fellow-creatures as have contributed to our welfare; these are innate good properties, and they acquit the Deity of the impiously imputed injustice of having given us a nature utterly depraved, and in itself deserving of damnation, because our first parents sinned.

Our native proneness to sensuality; to commit injustice to man, and disobedience to God, through the prevalence of worldly selfishness, or the temptations to which we may be exposed by penury; these bad propensities are the alloy in our nature, which constitutes our trial. Our first parents received their trial from the same alloy in their nature. They had but one precept to obey, but one temptation to repel, and yet they sinned. We have various temptations to resist, various commands to observe. That our trials are complicated and harder to resist, is not our fault. We have, as they had, competent powers of resistance, if we will exert them; and that our nature is not worse than theirs, the facility with which they committed wickedness, on the first temptation, demonstrates.

Where guilt is incurred, or the wish of incurring it has been indulged, notwithstanding the opposition of our virtuous propensities, our power of renouncing the evil depends on the grace of God, obtained by our prayers; and to procure such assistance, together with pardon for past crimes, we learn from revelation that a Redeemer was necessary. The belief in his expiatory power commits no outrage on our innate sense of justice.

The violent passions, and tendency to evil, often

apparent in the infant-state, are no proofs of a nature more corrupt than Adam's. They are but the prevalence of the bad tendencies which may be expected to prevail before reason acquires strength to resist them, and revelation extends its aid. Till then the human being is no more accountable for its errors, no more obnoxious to just condemnation, than the brute, the idiot, the lunatic.

It is only by this simple, plain construction, that the justice of God can be ascertained, the free-agency of man established, and the Scriptures be rendered consistent with themselves.

The doctrine of original sin, while it is contrary to the doctrine of Christ, is inimical to the practice of virtue, and leads to nothing good. So far from it, that misery and despair are its natural fruits. Under such belief those fruits cannot be avoided, except by the superstitious presumptuous credulity of having obtained, from a partial Deity, preternatural grace, and individual acceptance, granted only to a few; not as the reward of our endeavours to be virtuous, but from the influence of arbitrary favour.

Jeremy Taylor asserts, that the groundless doctrine of original sin was first made by the fierce uncharitable St Austin. Till then the fathers of the Christian church had abstained from wresting

a few unaccountable texts of St Paul, repugnant wholly to the tenets of his Master, and which, so wrested, disgrace Christianity. I confess I think, and shall always think, there must be something wrong in the head or heart of those who build the edifice of their faith on such a dismal foundation, pervious to the floods of despondence, while the Rock of Christ is at hand, on which the beams of hope and mercy shine.

Sincerely and warmly do I join your expressed delight, that the morning-star of peace at length arises on our long, our stormy, sanguinary night. Yet does it seem to me most strange, that you, my friend, together with almost all the rest of Mr Pitt's disciples, should exult in the peace, considering the terms on which it is obtained; while you refuse to confess the war to have been irrationally and wantonly prolonged, ill-conducted, and most disastrous in its consequences to this country, and to Europe in general.

Reasonless, surely, is it to vindicate Mr Pitt's late system, yet approve and triumph in peace, beneath the inevitable recollection, that if his desperate efforts had prevailed at Vienna, it had not now been ours. If there was any reality in those dangers to our constitution, which were, of late years, held out as the motives for continuing the baffled contest, then has Lord Grenville truly, as

forcibly stated, the certain and great augmentation of those dangers in the terms of its cessation. However, the sad truth, that peace could not be obtained on better terms, and that every year the war continued, increased, and must still farther increase, the sacrifices of this nation to procure peace, amply justifies our present ministers in renouncing the guilt of their predecessors. Yet Lord Grenville, and his dark-spirited colleague, the heir to a portion of Burke's eloquence, and to all his apostasy, are, in their opposition to reconcilement with France, consistent with their late belligerent principles. Those principles led, as Lord G. and Mr W.'s arguments now lead, to eternal war with France, while she retains her revolutionary principles, her republican form of government, and that menacing command of coast, the fatal present of the war. To that eternity of contest, the system of the late ministry led, if it led to any thing for which a reason could be given, especially under the avowed dread of the English populace imbibing the contagion of French principles, from the facility of association with Frenchmen, which peace must bring, come when it might.

I am glad you think with me, that the continuance of Buonaparte's life is an highly desirable circumstance to us, since, if he is not genuinely good, he

is wise enough to see that, next to the reality, the semblance of virtue is the soundest policy in states as in individuals; that justice and friendship towards other nations, best secure the prosperity of his own.

And for England, I hope and trust, that, oppressed as she is, and must long remain, by the grievous burdens of this wasteful war, and with her populace much more alienated by misery than they ever could have been by tenets, which the populace never examine, will find this blessed, though humbling peace, balmy to her wounds, and Lethéan to her wrongs; and that many years she may remain undisturbed by farther conflicts, external or internal!

Pray present to your venerable mother, now, with unimpaired faculties, in the last year of her century, my best regards; to your beloved wife, and to the charming Magdalene, to whom my wish of being known returns with her restored power of contributing to your and Mrs Whalley's happiness. I am conscious that your future peace is in her keeping;—may gratitude for the almost unexampled goodness she has received from you both, render the deposit sacred! Adieu!

LETTER LXXV.

CAPT. ROBERT WOLSELEY.

Lichfield, Dec. 14, 1801.

I HAVE the satisfaction to tell you that Mr Saville is, we trust, recovering from his late perilous seizure. At his time of life, relapses are much to be dreaded; but it is on all occasions wisdom to hope the best, and not to antedate in imagination the hour of anguish. He is obliged by your kind inquiries.

Your verses to Aspasia, are an ingenious and gallant hyperbole in musical numbers. You say the ideas are not entirely original. Keep your own counsel on that head to the lady. Perhaps she is not likely to trace you to your sources; nor am I likely to penetrate the mysterious veil you have thrown upon her identity. Prying curiosity, the reputed fault of the class of beings to which I belong, is not individually mine. Yet has it frequently been, and, in one instance, comically enough, my fate to receive the unsolicited confidence of lovers. At different periods, four ladies,

and three of them very slightly known to me, have poured upon my ear avowals of passion for my friend Captain S. Arden. They erroneously believed me entrusted with the state of his affections, and wanted to calculate upon intelligence, obtained from me, the chances of success which their attentions to him possessed,

"Silence that speaks, and eloquence of eyes."

Two of the four were widows; the first young and gay, shewy and well jointured; the second a little autumnal, soft of voice, and languid of eye; the other two were blooming spinsters.

They all declared to me that the loss of Captain A.'s right arm first created that tender interest, which, beneath only common politeness on his part, had ripened into love, impassioned and exclusive. So, if you young men wish to make conquests, you see how easily it may be done; a smart stroke with a cleaver, between your right elbow and shoulder, and the spell of irresistibility is complete.

I am glad you are preparing for us a poetical landscape of Wolseley Bridge, and its lovely environs. I should suppose the talents which produced that free and beautiful paraphrase of Crazy

Kate, were responsible even for the difficult task of appropriate description, which shall not feebly melt into insipid generality, its invariable fate in the hands of a poetaster.

I thank you, and I thank your domestic friends, for my assured welcome at Wolseley Hall, if I should ever have the happiness of paying my respects there; but, alas! the deep maim of last March, makes me a reluctant traveller, and a troublesome guest. Adieu!

LETTER LXXVI.

Rev. R. Fellowes.

Lichfield, Dec. 19, 1801.

Could I have arrested the short and fleeting day; could I have evaded the obtrusive claims, which swallowed up its hours; could I have averted the influence of dangerous disease from the frame of one of the dearest of my friends, which, during a week, produced in my mind an utter incapacity of attending to abstract themes, then had I not suffered several weeks to pass away since I received your late excellent publica-

tion*, ere I gave it that reiterated perusal, that sedulous attention which it can so richly reward, ere I addressed you on its subject.

Accept, at length, my fervent thanks, involuntarily delayed, not only for the work itself, but for the high, perhaps too high, and most highly prized honour done to myself, and my publications, at the close of your benevolent note on Mr Godwin's dangerous philosophy.

Deeply impressed by the contents of this volume, I can truly say, that I do not think our language has any composition in divinity so just to the doctrines of the Old and New Testament; so demonstrative of their consistence, their wisdom, their equity, and their mercy. It is only to those malevolent spirits, and those misguided enthusiasts, that your books will not be welcome, and by whom they will be vilified; who make cruelty, partiality, and injustice, chief attributes of the Deity; who wish to promote the temporal misery of every human being, and who so confidently devote to eternal misery all those whom they cannot inspire with demon-haunting terrors, suddenly changing to presumptuous confidence, with abject homage to their Creator, utterly derogatory to the equity and loftiness of his nature.

* Religion without Cant.

Your volumes appear to me to condense all former wisdom of explanation; to render superfluous every future attempt to explain the mysteries of the Christian faith, to prove its justice, its rationality, and its benevolence.

The style of this volume, like that of its predecessor, is nervous and eloquent, with the exception of one habit of expression. Perhaps, had I known the title of your last work before it became irrevocable, I should have pleaded hard for the banishment of one word in the title page, which has an inelegant reviling sound; and in the table of contents to so serious a book, for the exchange of the word *ladies* to that of *women*.

You are probably unconscious how perpetually the phrase, *as it were*, occurs though these pages. In some few instances it may be happily applied; but seldom does it add force to remark, or prove a graceful apology for metaphor. It often gives a timid air to diction, and is more frequently an unsightly excrescence, than a fruit or flower in oratory.

But these are slight specks in a polemic luminary, to which we may apply what our great epic poet says of the sun:

——————"Pure source of light,
From whence inferior orbs may lustre draw."

A young clergyman of any judgment might stock himself for life with excellent sermons formed from these pages.

May the nation prove worthy of gifts so precious to its best welfare!—but I much fear that it will not; all the leading reviews are in the hands either of Calvinists or dissenters. The first will load your pure writings with redoubled soliloquy; the second will, with less acrimony, feel but with some petulant soreness, the strength of your argument against separating from the established church for trivial reasons.

Such people may retard the rising fame of the noblest compositions from the infallibility with which the undiscerning many invest the decisions of reviewers; but truth and genius, by the aid of time, by the necessarily slow accumulation of the suffrages of those few, in every age and period, who are unwarped by interest, prejudice, or envy, will be enabled to disperse each shrouding mist, which, for an interval, obscures their beams.

LETTER LXXVII.

LADY ELEANOR BUTLER AND MISS PONSONBY.

Lichfield, Dec. 20, 1801.

MOST kind, dearest ladies, is that attention, of which the precious, though melancholy, proofs lie before me. I cannot persuade myself to delay the united acknowledgments of Mr Saville and myself, even till the sad certainty is ours of the impending fatality at Dinbren. We are both very uneasy about the hopeless state of its hospitable warm-hearted mistress; and Mr S. is himself in a state of health to which inquietude and sorrow are very formidable.

The distress of poor Mr Roberts' mind has probably prevented his communication of my last letter, describing the dire alarm which the first of this month brought us for the life of Mr Saville, whose worth you so well know. It has left a sense of alarm and dread upon my mind, which perhaps will never leave it, though the immediate peril passed away; and though, with some drawbacks, he has continued amending;

but my fear of a relapse withers my exertion, and I sink, amongst many claims, into almost epistolary bankruptcy.

Then I grieve for dear Mr Whalley's irreparable loss, not only in a wife, so justly dear to him, but in the means of obtaining a continuance of those expensive elegancies in his style of living, which long habit has rendered necessary to his comforts. I fear his wane of life will severely feel the inconvenience and deprivation resulting from the Quixotic generosity of his youth, when, as I have been informed, lest the world should think and say, and lest his beloved Mrs Sherwood should suspect, that his attachment was mercenary, he would not marry her till she had settled upon her own relations, after her death, all her maiden fortune*, except an annuity of L. 200. Her considerable jointure must drop with her.

The worst of it is, that the few people, capable of heroic disdain of the *auri sacra fames*, are exactly those who can the least dispense with those gratifications, of which gold is the source.

Mr Roberts is of that class, though his expenses, in comparison with those of my friends, Sir Brooke Boothby and Mr Whalley, are as the

* Mrs Whalley was heiress to an affluent fortune.

morn-dew on the myrtle leaf to that stream of expense down which they have sailed.

Ah! poor Mrs Roberts—probably, ere this hour, that ardent and honest and generous heart of hers is cold and insensate; that open countenance, over which, when unruffled by vexation, such varying gleams of comic fancy perpetually played, dispensing mirth and heart's-ease to all around her, is now rigid, stern, immoveable, never, never to smile again! And Mrs Whalley too, in a gentler, quieter way, was arch and amusing, and most genuinely good. Thus do our friends drop around us, till, if we ourselves live long, it is to look through eyes dimmed by tears at a busy bustling world, peopled with strangers.

I am pleased that my poem, The Lake, was acceptable to you, whose scenic taste is so vivid, inventive, and distinguished. I expect to find Southey's odd lyric epic full of genius, however wild and irregular, since it has been twice perused by the Lady Eleanor and her friend; and since it is destined to the high honour of a place in their library.

They are kind in saying that they hope I shall soon read it there; but my imbecility is so much increased by the accident of last March; my spirits are so alarmed and depressed, as to inspire the apprehension that the pleasures of Langollen

vale may not again be mine. I have also internal sensations, which tell me my days will be few, and passed disconsolately; but let not my gloomy prognostics obtrude themselves where I wish to impart nothing but pleasure!

We trust Mr Roberts will not be obliged to leave Dinbren; but, when it is naked of its mistress, a degree of mental desolation will be felt by all who revisit that noble mountain, and have experienced her cordial welcome on its brow.

Mr Saville and his daughter present their grateful compliments. The former assures you, that, if life and tolerable health are granted him, he will execute your commissions, next spring, with glad alacrity,

"And train the vernal scions for their growth."

Lady Cork was at my house a day and a half this week. She is very friendly to me, and has much sprightliness, energy of character, and genuine wit. A stranger countess was a formidable business to the weak spirits of Mr S., which he had no design to encounter. But she declared she would see and converse with him. She sent her message—that his sole alternative was to come down to dinner, or permit her to dine in his apartment. She prescribed to him with hu-

mane attention. We talked of Langollen vale, and its stars. Lady Cork expressed her wishes personally to receive their influence. Should she obtain that happiness, I think it would beam upon her in all its benignity, for I persuade myself that her manners and conversation would interest and please.

I have the honour to remain, dearest ladies, &c.

LETTER LXXVIII.

Mrs Childers.

Lichfield, Dec. 27, 1801.

Silences to each other of involuntary length are mutually our fate, and, well I know, are reciprocally regretted. It would be fruitless to enumerate the causes which co-operated to produce my late taciturnity. Some of them were melancholy ones; so melancholy as to wither, during some days, every power of exertion.

You congratulate me upon the peace; and indeed it is well that the mad career of Bellona, miserable for Europe, and ruinous to England, is at last arrested; but the blessing is come much

too late to repair the mischiefs of the curse. Though the wide waste of life, and the tears of the surviving mourners may pass away from remembrance, other, and more dangerous miseries, the certain consequence of the needless warfare, will remain, and substitute, for phantom-danger, real peril to the government of this country. The dreadful load of debt it has left, renders it impossible to remove the burden of the taxes, which every class shifts from its own shoulders to those of the class beneath them; the noblemen, and large-estated gentlemen, by raised rents to their tenants; the tenants by monopoly, and the extravagant price they exact for the necessaries of life; and the mercantile world, by evasion protected, by the impossibility of the commissioners calculating the income resulting from their traffic, shift the burden to the lowest order of the people, who pine and perish in want, and incur disease, which spreads contagion over the land.

The populace are now looking to peace, and the fruits of the late plenteous harvest, for the return of their comforts. They will find, alas! a bitter disappointment; and when they have lost all hope of redress to their grievances, it is dreadfully probable that they will rush on change, stimulated by the agricultural plenty, the rising commerce, and the increased power of France;

and though their efforts will but redouble their wretchedness, they will probably end in long anarchy, and blasted empire.

Meanwhile imputed Jacobinism, that stalking-horse which carried into effect the insane plans of the late ministry, having served its purpose, has, like the fatal steed of Leonora,

> "Thinn'd and bleached, and paled, and then
> Vanish'd in smoke away."

I know there are countless beauties in Pamela, yet did I start at your epithet for it, viz. "incomparable," since, on the instant it met my sight, arose to the eye of my mind the Clarissa, and the Grandison; whose immense superiority always induced me to consider Pamela as a dim dawn of the brightest day of imaginative ethics that ever rose upon English literature. I spurn the name of novel or romance for such noble compositions.

I lately met with a passage in one of Lord Orford's juvenile letters to this effect: "I can send you no news; the late singular novel is the universal, and only theme—Pamela is like snow, she covers every thing with her whiteness."

Buxton did nothing for my March injury. During a fortnight of the month I staid there,

your favourite and admirer, the classical and elegant Christopher Smith, his learned friend, Mr Booth, and my worthy, and witty, and literary old acquaintance, Colonel Barry, met most afternoons at my lodgings, and shed the light of their talents over the land of strangers. Barry's friend, Colonel Crowder, was there with his beauteous niece, introduced to me by Barry. She often was a fifth in our conversations—the fair Vanessa of the intellectual scene. Smith and I forever regretted you absence.

How egregiously has Miss H. More exposed herself to the reproach of that absurd and intolerant methodism with which I have long believed her tainted? I refer you for the proofs to the Anti-Jacobin Review for July last.—Adieu!

END OF VOLUME FIFTH.

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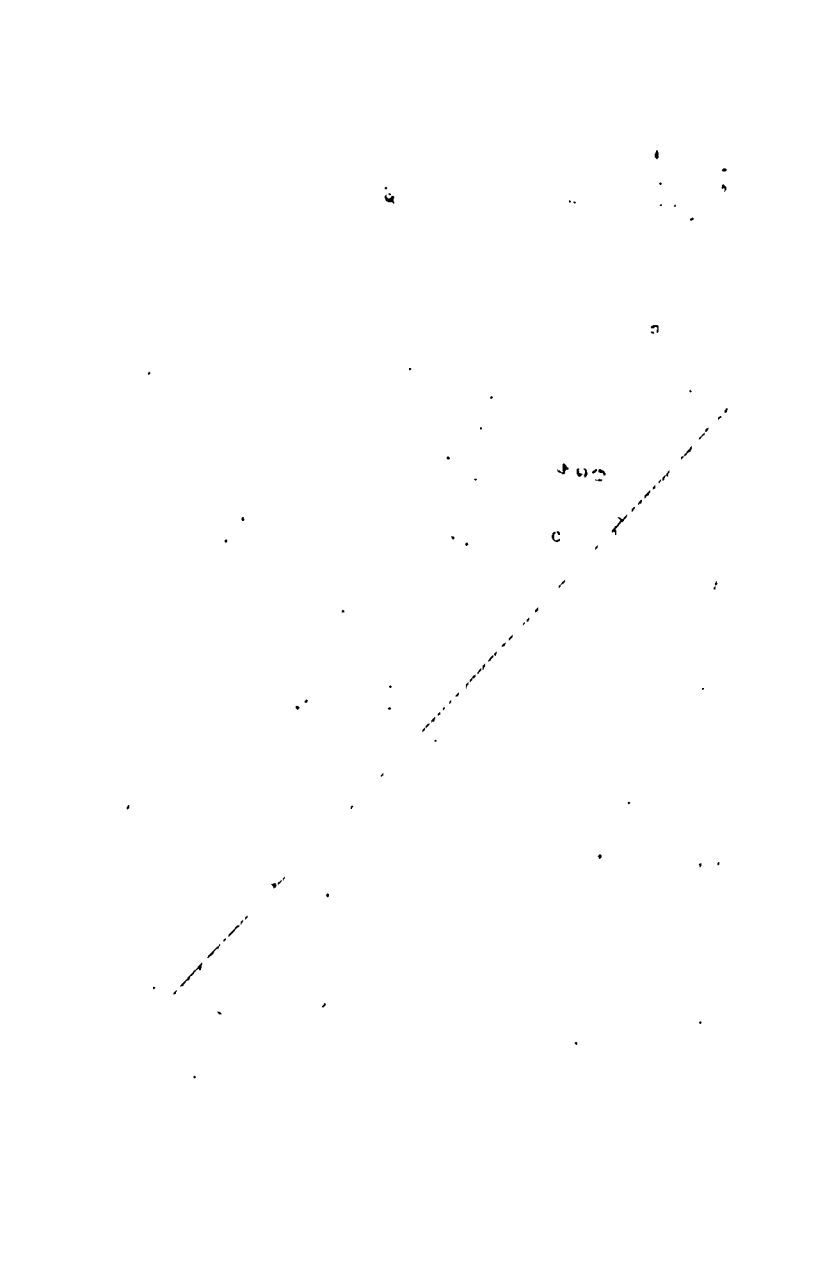

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